On Review: Mapex Thrones and a Summit Snare

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APRIL 2024

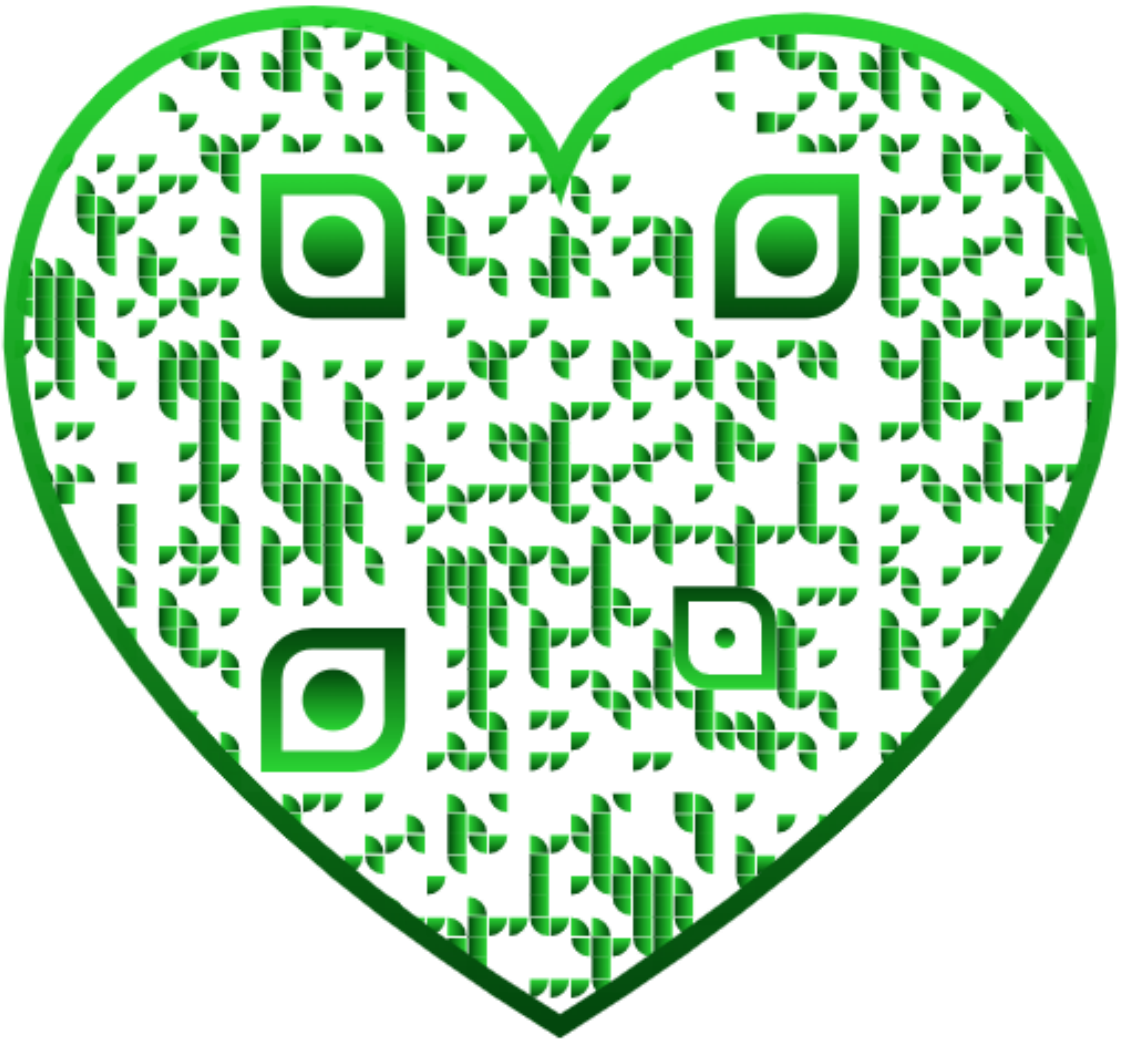
Justin Timberlake's
Mike Reid

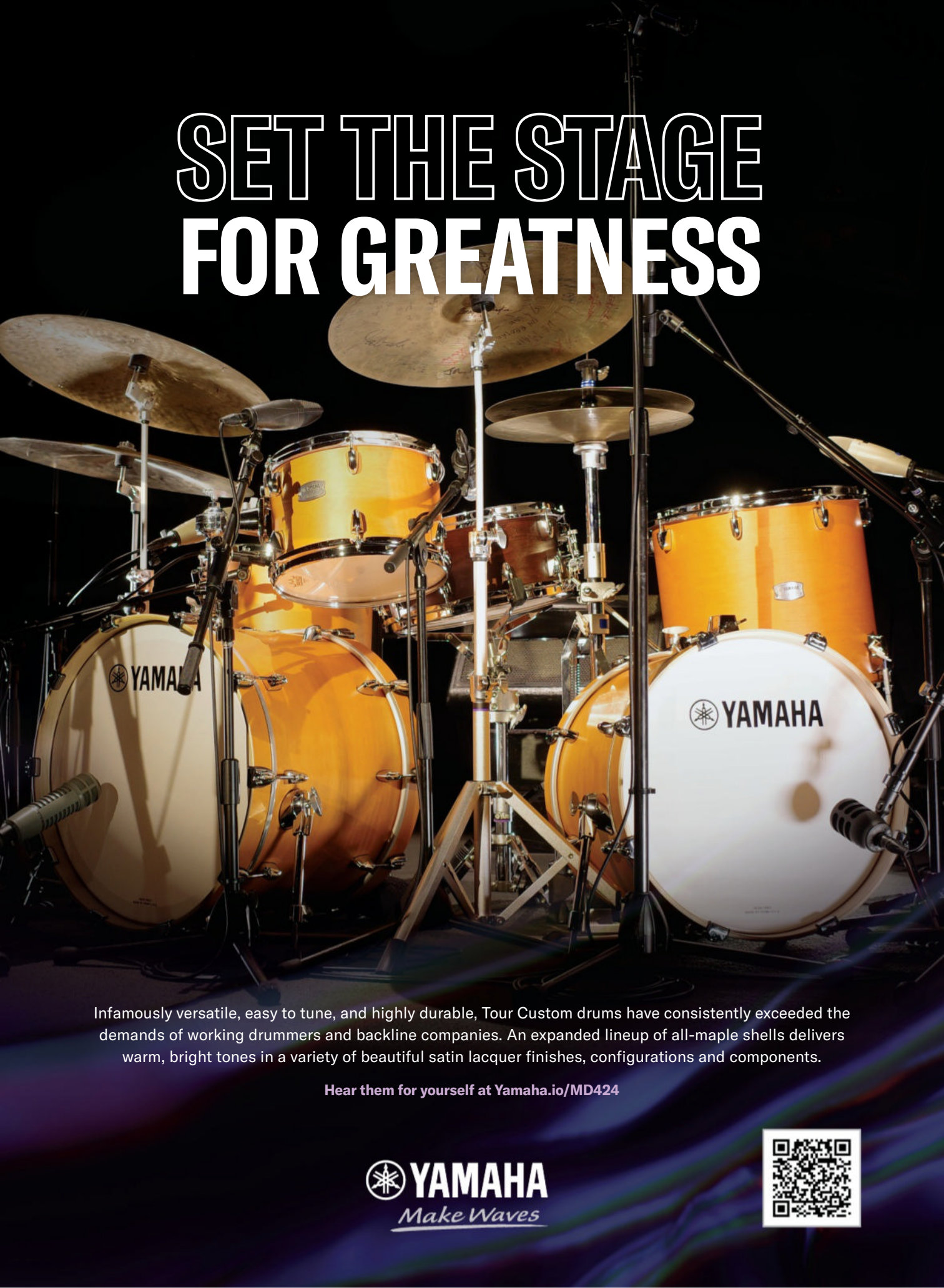
A Different View with
Lenny Kravitz

Chic's
Ralph Rolle

Enrique Iglesias and Steve Morse's
Van Romaine

Philly Joe Jones Transcription
"Two Bass Hit"





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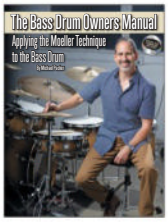

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AN EDITOR'S OVERVIEW

Listen to What the Music is Telling You to Play!

In this month's *Modern Drummer,* legendary songwriter Lenny Kravitz, Justin Timberlake's Mike Reid, and Chic's Ralph Rolle all allude to the phrase, "Listen to what the music is telling you to play" in their interviews regarding the subject of how to create a drum part for a song.

When I am teaching today, this question often comes up from students of all ages and levels. Furthermore, I remember asking my teacher's this exact same question when I was a very young and aspiring drummer. My first teacher Dan Davis told me, "Just listen to what the music is telling you to play, that's how you create a drum part!" I must admit, I was young, and my teacher was a very intellectual and "deep" guy, I was VERY lucky! But I wasn't quite prepared for that type of "philosophical" answer. I didn't understand. I remember thinking, "Listen to what the music is telling me… *Maybe this guy spent a little too much time at Woodstock.*" I was very wrong. It was a wonderful answer, I was just too young to understand it. But I still remember the question, and the answer. As with many questions and answers, it can take a while to fully understand and comprehend what they really mean. To me, those are always the best ones. Thankfully, I had time to figure things out. Great things take time.

Many years later when I was a young drummer on a recording session, a songwriter played me a simple demo of a new song and I asked, "What kind of groove are you hearing on this tune?" His reply was familiar phrase, "Just listen to the song, that will tell you what to play." I listened to the lyrics, the melody, the bass line, the rhythm guitar part, and to how the piano chords outlined the song structure. Thankfully, a later teacher had also taught me how songs were constructed and created. These same subjects are talked about in the last two installments of Ron Spagnardi's Teacher's Forum column involving form, structure, the Circle of 5ths, and how Roman Numerals represent harmony in musical compositions. On that session, I actually listened to what the song was "saying" to me, and the songwriter liked what I played.

Thankfully, when you are armed with the right information, creating an inspired and tasteful drum part isn't too difficult. If, you are listening to what the music is telling you to play. But don't take it from me, listen to Lenny, Mike, and Ralph… and my old teacher Dan Davis (it turns out *he didn't spend too much time at Woodstock, he wasn't even there,* but he was a GREAT drum teacher!)

Modern Drummer, arming drummers with the right information for 47 years!
Listen and learn!

Mark Griffith
Editor-in-Chief, Director of Content

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MODERN DRUMMER magazine (ISSN 0194-4533) is published digitally monthly and print bi-monthly by ***MODERN DRUMMER*** Publications, Inc., 1279 W. Palmetto Park Rd PO Box 276064 Boca Raton, FL 33427. PERIODICALS MAIL POSTAGE paid at Boca Raton, FL 33427 and at additional mailing offices.

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EDITORIAL/ADVERTISING/ ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICES: MODERN DRUMMER Publications, 1279 W. Palmetto Park Rd PO Box 276064 Boca Raton, FL 33427.
Email: info@moderndrummer.com.

MODERN DRUMMER welcomes manuscripts and photos but cannot assume responsibility for them.

SUBSCRIPTION CORRESPONDENCE: Modern Drummer, 1279 W. Palmetto Park Rd, PO Box 276064, Boca Raton, FL 33427. Change of address: Allow at least six weeks for a change. Please provide both old and new address and send to info@moderndrummer.com

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Modern Drummer, 1279 W. Palmetto Park Rd PO Box 276064 Boca Raton, FL 33427.

Canadian Publications Mail Agreement No. 41480017 Return undeliverable Canadian addresses to: PO Box 875, Stn A, Windsor ON N9A 6P2

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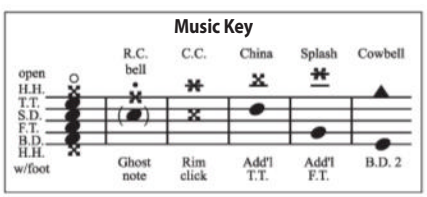

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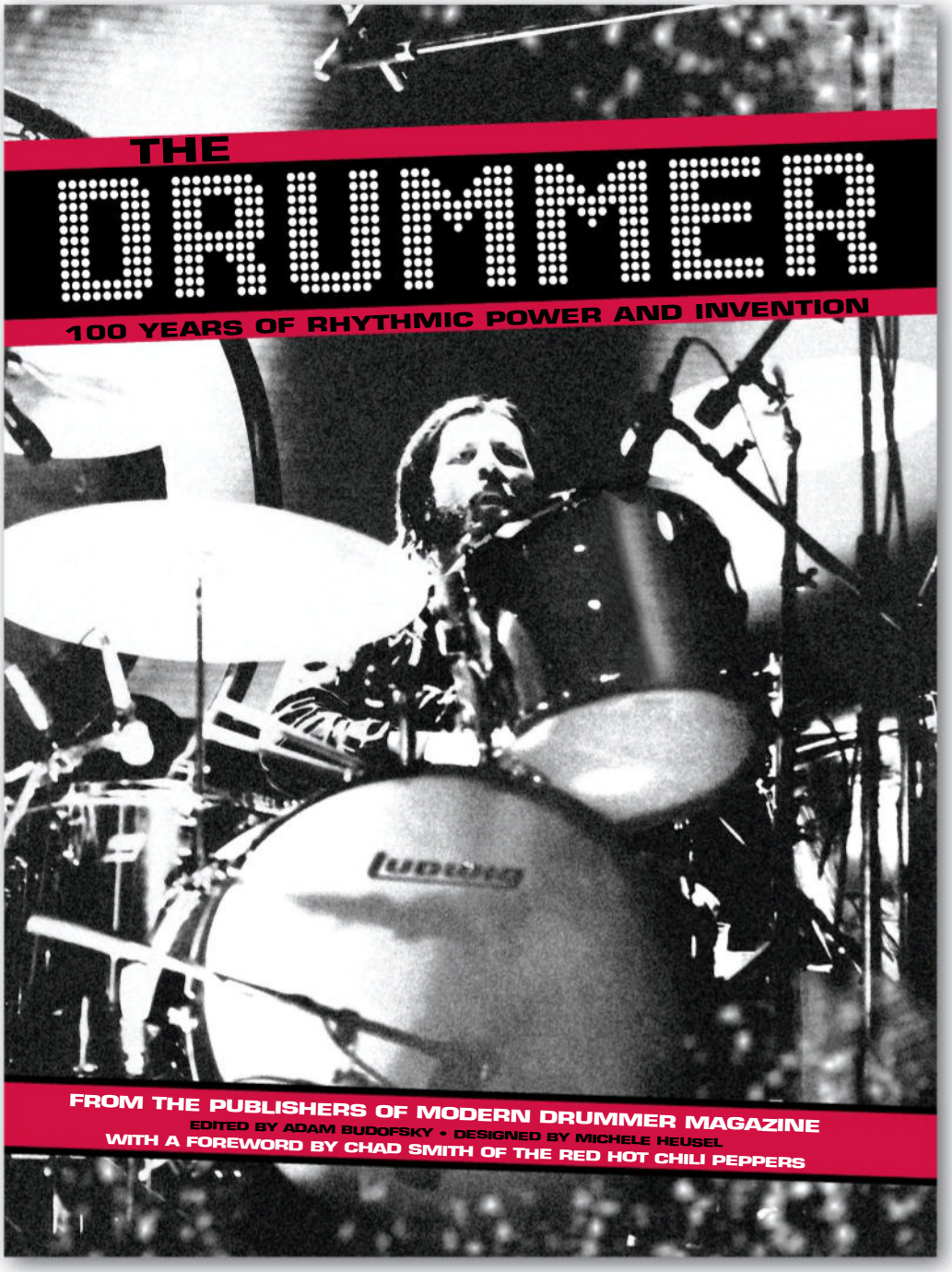

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Custom RCI Starlite Moondust Acrylic Kit

This month's *Modern Drummer* Kit of the Month comes to us from drummer Lou Caldarola. Lou's kit was created by Romano Cotone of RCI Starlite Company in CT. Moondust shells were a limited run consisting of clear acrylic shell with added holo-foil flakes for an added sparkle effect. The shell was inspired by the classic super ball you'd get from a vending machine in the 70s. The shells are the welded "seamless" style for a warmer sound and tone. This kit was also outfitted with full acrylic dress diamonds on the main bass drum and both snares. It is an outstanding sounding kit with an unmatched and unique look. To top it off, this kit is also outfitted with custom "atomic bomb" shaped lugs across the whole kit and includes a vintage style matching canister throne. The basic kit sizes are as follows: 16x24 bass drum w/ dress diamonds, 20x24 bass drum, 12x6 Octoban,14x6 Octoban, 6.5x14 snare w/ dress diamonds, 3.5x13 snare w/ dress diamonds, 7x10 and 8x13 rack toms, 14x14, 14x16, 16x18 floor toms, and a 24" canister throne.

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Shelly Manne: "You Can't Have 2 and 4 Without . . ."

By Peter Erskine

What is the essence of a musician? How do we quantify their achievements, their history, their sound, and their very being? For many of us, such revelations came by way of LPs — oftentimes not-to-secret communications from the past, but just as often coded messages from the future (or so it seemed.) Jazz performances were a scarce treasure when it came to television back in the day. Now, we have YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok, but I daresay that most of these performances are truncated and concentrated consumable snacks of debatable worth, instead of quality that can stand the test of time; I'll see your drum flavor of the month and raise you two Papa Jo's. A new source of the old is something to celebrate. Brothers and sisters of the drum, have I got an album for you!

To clarify, I have no pony in this race aside from loving Shelly Manne and loving any great recording. Combine a newfound audio treasure, a trove of photographs, with super-informative text, and you have *Jazz from the Pacific Northwest* by Shelly Manne & His Men.

This package was produced by archivist-supreme Zev Feldman along with Cory Weeds and is available from Reel to Reel Recordings. Having grown up on a diet of Shelly Manne & His Men, Shelly with acoustic guitarist Jack Marshall, with Oliver Nelson's big band, or with his first boss, Stan Kenton; hearing this recording is a time machine that goes in every direction. Because Shelly Manne, that ultimate timekeeper, was a musician capable of making timeless musical utterances, statements, and performances. This being a wordy way to say that this music sounds as modern and fresh as if it were recorded yesterday or tomorrow.

I'm going to do a reveal here and quote from my portion of the liner notes in the generous booklet that accompanies the release including informative text and entertaining photos, many of which are new to me and will be to you, too.

"I first heard Shelly Manne on the *Artistry in Rhythm* album of Stan Kenton's. There was a big drum feature for Shelly called "Artistry in Percussion," composed by Pete Rugolo. I never could really appreciate how great Shelly's drumming was on that until I was tasked with playing that same piece years later. Then I realized, holy cow, it was quite a handful! Especially when you consider the time when it was recorded and how unusual it was for the drums to assume that particular role. The drums were featured with bands, but not in this classical kind of setting. I don't know if Shelly adapted to accommodate that demand, or if he always had this innate ability to be at home in any genre. There was never another percussionist who could be at home and wear so many different hats and play so many different styles of music. Max Roach, who I think was one of Shelly's primary heroes and influences, came close with his great interest in classical music. But Shelly, not only because of all the work he did in the studios playing the drums, but also using all manner of percussion – and being known as one of the guys who was always searching for new sounds. Shelly really was, at least for me, an example of what I wanted to be when I grew up. Shelly did a marvelous album on Capitol called *Sounds*. It was Jack Marshall on guitar and Shelly. But he wasn't playing the drums so much as playing modified drum sets with lots of different percussion – even playing mallets on the open strings of a guitar. He was a real sound colorist.

I have a story about when I was working with John Williams on a film score for *The Adventures of Tintin*. My part was very simple – I'm playing this old vintage drum set and it's 1, 2, 1, 2 on a snare drum with a brush. John Williams had said to the orchestra, "Do not attempt to add any expressiveness or interpretation unless it's specifically notated on the part. That's how we'll get maximum expression from the ensemble." So, we record a take and near the end of one of the phrases, I involuntarily did these very subtle little hairpin dynamics. But in the playback, it stuck out like a sore thumb. John Williams walked over to me and said, "Peter, didn't you just love Shelly?" I said, "Oh yeah, Shelly was the best." He continued, "Yeah, he did like to call attention to himself, though. Wouldn't you agree?" I laughed and said, "OK, John, thank you for the note." But all of this was to say that this was not a criticism. I think that the fact that Shelly was such an extrovert was a remarkable piece of the musical puzzle that was Shelly Manne.

Shortly after meeting Shelly in Hollywood at a music store in 1980, I got to spend time with him during a flight from Los Angeles to Tokyo (I had been in Weather Report for a couple of years at this point.) I was seated next to him on the plane. Lucky

me! We're all in economy class, but Freddie Hubbard had paid out of his own pocket to upgrade to first class. I mention that because Shelly was holding court, so Freddie spent most of the flight standing in the aisle, just so he wouldn't miss a thing that Shelly was saying. It was just a remarkable hang with Shelly.

During the flight I got brave and showed Shelly a manuscript of my first drum book. It was just a series of articles, but he read it and turned to me and said, "Yeah, really, I dig what you're saying about the importance of two and four." I agreed, and he turned to me, looked me right in the eye, and said, "But don't forget, man, you can't have two and four without one and three." He wasn't being clever, the old-timers really felt they had to emphasize the importance of one to a lot of younger musicians, myself included. Shelly was always paying it forward in terms of teaching, being very generous, and supportive.

I'd grown up listening to Shelly, not only with Stan Kenton, but also with his groups, including a number of records they made for the Contemporary label. On those records, and on all the different albums, I identified a lot with him in each of those musical contexts. However, the way that I played in Stan's band was different. The material we were doing was quite a bit different. I was a younger, long-haired hippie drummer at that time, so I was just grappling with trying to meet the music on my own terms. Shelly was definitely a swinger, but I would also describe him as the ultimate colorist. His appreciation and explorations of sound were only rivaled by his ability to swing. He was a very chatty, interactive musician. And even though he was an extrovert, I feel that he always served the music. To put it in one sentence: Shelly was the kind of drummer I wanted to be when I grew up.

It's sad that we lost Shelly 40 years ago, but people should remember that Shelly Manne was a good-hearted man, and a tremendous musician who could play anything and everything. And like I said, he was a swinger – anything Shelly touched or played swung. " *(Excerpted from an interview conducted by Zev Feldman on May 5, 2022.)*

True confession: I went out of my way to emphasize the "swinger" part of Shelly during this interview because Shelly's widow Flip Manne expressed her irritation on more than one occasion to me that Mel Lewis was always credited with being *the drummer* that swung with the Kenton band. Indeed, he did, but so did Shelly. They were different from one another. And that just goes to show there's more than one way to dig a cat on the skins.

In addition to being the model drummer, Shelly was also the model studio musician in Hollywood, a composer for television, a jazz club owner (Shelly's Manne Hole,) and even a man who raised horses. Shelly Manne could do it all, and he did until his untimely death in 1984 at the age of 64. He left a legacy of recorded music that has been acknowledged as the best of the west (and how about Sonny Rollins' *Way Out West* ?) Now we have *Jazz from the Pacific Northwest*.

I cannot recommend this new album enough. If you even so much as just like the drums, then this is a gift from the Gods. Shelly's Men — the band — sound so good, and the recording is a model lesson in how a great drummer serves the music. The music was recorded at the 1958 Monterey Jazz Festival as well as in a Portland, Oregon jazz club. The band personnel changes a bit and it's of particular fascination to me hearing how bassist Monty Budwig responds to pianist Hampton Hawes, who was filling in for Manne regular Russ Freeman. This is a great lesson in the magic of musical personalities and band interaction. The album package is a timely reminder of how great the late Shelly Manne was and continues to be. I am honored for my comments about Shelly to rest alongside those of Joe LaBarbera, Jim Keltner, Ruth Price, and Bill Holman.

To help complete the picture of Shelly Manne, here are some additional listening recommendations:
"The Dart Game," from *Swinging Sounds, Vol. 4* (Contemporary) A brilliant composition by alto saxophonist Charlie Mariano, and a model display of Shelly's ability to support a band while being uniquely communicative on the kit.
"Moose the Mooche" from *More Swinging Sounds Vol. 5* (Contemporary) For anyone who may have doubted Shelly's chops or innovative ingenuity, I rest my case with this track. The trades became a staple of transcription requirements in my USC studio.
"Sound Piece for Jazz Orchestra," Oliver Nelson, *Sound Pieces* (Impulse) Shelly playing mallets on toms, something he did better than anyone before or since. Incredible interplay with the soloists and the big band. As good as it gets.

Check out Peter's drummer profile page, and get a copy of his Legends book at moderndrummer.com

NEW and NOTABLE

BFD Player 1.2 Update Offers More Drum Kits, Mix Presets and Grooves

Pioneering drum software company BFD, announces BFD Player 1.2 - now available for purchase at bfddrums.com. The latest update in the BFD Player platform, originally launched in October 2023, adds additional drum kits, mix presets and grooves for songwriters and music producers, while providing customized workflow opportunities. With an ever-increasing library of expansions packs and the world's largest collection of acoustic drum samples on the market, BFD represents a compelling solution for achieving drum sounds that are rich in timbral detail and articulation — and suitable for nearly any musical genre.

Enhanced editing capabilities

With BFD Player 1.2, users can simply drag and drop grooves from the Groove Browser right into the drum track. Seamlessly edit tracks with enhanced cut/copy/paste functionality or split a groove more precisely at the playhead cursor. BFD Player can be used as a standalone virtual instrument, or within your favorite DAW environment. With over 340 grooves created by top drummers and professionally mixed, radio-ready drumsets, BFD can shorten the distance between composition and completion, making users more productive.

Users are also provided with deep customization options by using 4 built-in macros to adjust a range of mix parameters, or by re-routing the drums for additional processing through your favorite plug-ins.

Eight New Powerful Expansion Packs

With BFD Player 1.2, users are invited to explore eight all-new new expansion packs, each with a unique identity for different genres and musical styles. To get started with BFD Player, users can explore and download the software for free here: **https://www.bfddrums.com/drum-software/bfd-player.html.**

Pearl introduces new Professional Maple Series Drums

Debuting in 1985 under the Professional Series title, Pearl's original MLX drums featured high-end elements uncommon for instruments of the era. Their all-Maple shell construction boasted a host of high-gloss lacquer finishes that quickly found a home with gigging and touring drummers alike. Drawing from this classic combination, Pearl's newly updated Professional Series drums return with the spirit of the original and a refreshed presence for the experienced player.

Featuring thin, EvenPly Six North American Maple shells, their lively sonic warmth projects with broad tonal frequency in performance. "Professional Series drums have the essentials that MLX had, but with a more current feel," says Pearl Vice President of Sales and Marketing Glen Caruba. "Our team at Pearl is made up of active gigging drummers, and we put these kits through the paces to assure total satisfaction from everyone who plays one."

Our classic RL Lug, OptiMount Tom Suspension System, 2.3mm Superhoop II Triple-Flanged hoops, and Remo UT Pinstripe heads are added for strength and stability. A choice of three pre-configured shell packs in five classic Pearl transparent Gloss Lacquer finishes (and one Premium Wrap) assure a solid look and feel for varied venues and playing styles. Finally, to save your stand footprint and cartage load, Pearl's original GryoLock independent bass drum-mounted tom holders deliver maximum adjustability and positioning without robbing the shells of tone or sustain.

• Professional Maple 4-pc. Shell Pack (PMX924BEDP/C) of 16x22 Bass Drum, 16x16 Floor Tom, 8x12 and 7x10 Toms. MSRP: $3618.00, MAP: $2,352.99

For more information on the new Professional Series Maple Drums, please visit **www.pearldrum.com.**

Beyerdynamic Anniversary Edition DT 770 PRO Studio Headphones

Celebrating its centennial, beyerdynamic is embarking on a new chapter with the announcement of a limited-edition version of the classic DT 770 PRO headphones. Handmade in Germany, the all-new DT 770 PRO X Limited Edition blends the reference-setting features of the DT 770 PRO with the dynamic STELLAR.45 driver system's flexibility and a detachable cable so you can move freely while you create. A recess in the headband padding also protects against the pressure-sensitive fontanelle, allowing you to wear the headphones for hours on end. With premium sound quality, replaceable parts, low impedance and high-wearing comfort, the DT 770 PRO X Limited Edition is tailor-made for studio professionals, artists, filmmakers, producers and more.

"By combining the beloved features of the DT 770 PRO with the latest driver technology of the DT 700 PRO X, whether you're in a bustling studio or recording at home, the DT 770 PRO X Limited Edition delivers an unparalleled performance," said beyerdynamic CEO Andreas Rapp. The DT 770 PRO X studio headphones are available in limited quantities for pre-order at Guitar Center and Sweetwater for $199. Additional availability will be announced later this year.

Porter & Davies Announces a New TT6 Throne User

Til Lindemann's drummer Joe Letz has recently purchased a TT6 Equipped Throne. Joe Letz is a multi-talented drummer and DJ. He was drummer with the Norwegian electro-industrial band Combichrist for more than thirteen years during which time they toured as support for metal legends Rammstein. More recently this versatile player has joined Rammstein's frontman, Til Lindemann in his solo project Lindemann. His hard hitting style ensures the driving atmosphere of Lindemann's music is forced into every cell of the listeners body.

On the recent 2023 European tour he used the Porter & Davies TT6 Equipped Throne. Its bespoke 1000TW super-transducer sends high-quality audio over a full range of tactile frequencies to a drummer allowing them to literally feel everything they play through their body. The highly sensitive throne which can be driven by a stage amp from the monitor desk has a wide, powerful dynamic range with no latency. It is particularly suited to fast double bass drum and / or double pedal players in high volume situations.

Talking about the TT6 Letz said, "Every once in a while you stumble upon a piece of gear that you simply do not know how you functioned so long without….This throne is EVERYTHING! To think that just a couple of months ago I required what was basically an entire PA system to be sitting next to me on stage….This thing is never leaving my side again!" To find out more about replacing the PA system sitting behind the drum kit please go to **porteranddavies.co.uk/.**

MAPEX 600 SERIES DRUM THRONES

Comfort Meets Endurance

By Brian Hill

Ask any seasoned drummer or percussionist what is the most important piece of equipment that you own, and most will resoundingly say that's it's the seat that they sit on. Why? Because sitting while drumming is a four-limb exercise in aerobic balance! Not properly supporting your body, starting with your back, is generally a recipe for PAIN!

Our friends over at Mapex Drums sent *Modern Drummer* three new additions to the popular 600 Series Drum Thrones. The 600 Series originally comprised of only the T670 model, which featured a thick round vinyl seat and a tube spindle design; and the T660 model, which features a thin round vinyl seat and a threaded spindle base. All 600 Series models come standard with three very stable, double-braced legs with big, non-slip rubber feet. A classy Mapex logo appears on the back of each of the black seats in a white font.

So, forget about the chair in the corner, or that crappy piece of yesterday you call a drum throne. Let's take look at, or better yet take a seat on, the three new thrones that I placed behind some test kits and give you a quick tour.

Mapex has added three additions to their line-up of thrones, and those thrones are what we are reviewing this month. First up are the two saddle seat style thrones. The T675A features a soft, black vinyl top and a tube spindle base. The T685 features a soft black cloth top with a threaded spindle base. Both seat tops are wide and well designed. Mapex states "enlarged seating area ensures greater accommodation and enhanced comfort for the drummer. A rounded seat edge facilitates optimized thigh placement, and a 2.5-degree decline prevents drummer from slipping."

I really liked the way these two saddle-seats felt and supported me. They are extremely comfortable and were great for extended playing. They do what Mapex said they would do. The ridge at the back of the seat worked great to let me know where the back, or end of the seat is. Both bases had a locking mechanism to make sure the height of the seat stays where you put it.

The third seat is the T680 drum throne. This seat surprised me. It features a thick

T680

round top with soft cloth material and employs a threaded spindle for sturdy height adjustment. As with the other thrones described here, there is a spindle lock to keep it where you put it. Mapex says that "the new T680 model boasts SGS-Certified denser foam for unprecedented softness, coupled with a refined black cloth-top, ensuring players enjoy superior comfort."

This might be one of the most comfortable round seats for the money I've used. I usually don't go for round seats because I've grown accustomed to the saddle-style for stability. This seat was very stable and comfortable. I had no problem with this style, or the others for that matter, for extended playing.

T685

T675A

These new Mapex 600 Series thrones are easy to pack up and despite the strength and sturdiness of them, they are extremely light in weight. That's a real plus for the gigging player. Anything to lighten the load while getting the job done right is a plus in my book.

After taking the time to give them a good work out, I'd have to say that I can recommend these for serious consideration. Affordably priced, comfort certainly has met endurance! I would use them in a heartbeat! But, if you really want to know more about them, find your local Mapex dealing drum shop and, well, Sit On It! Online pricing: T680 & T685 $129.00. T675A $109.00 Check 'em out at **mapexdrums.com**

Summit Drums Pinnacle Series

Handcrafted Steam Bent Solid Shell Drums

By Brian Hill

Barberton, Ohio, is home to Summit Drums, and its master woodworking drum builder, Gary Posey. I first ran across Summit Drums while visiting the PA and Delaware Drum Shows. Summit Drums have been exhibiting at these shows for the last several years and always seems to get a lot of attention, so I naturally started checking them out and keeping an eye on them. This past year I got the feeling that this was indeed a very serious and passionate group when comes to drum building. Summit Drums is a boutique, custom drum shop that is focused on high quality, single-ply, steam bent drums.

Gary sent *Modern Drummer* a very cool Birdseye Maple snare to check out and see what we thought. The drum we received was a clear coated, 6x14 solid Birdseye Maple shell with hand crafted quarter-inch reinforcement rings that were beautifully formed into the shell and bearing edge. I like the "full round-over" bearing edge design that goes way back in drum design. The edges were perfectly level and lightly hand sanded for a beautiful finish. The snare bed was graceful and like the rest of the shell, finely sanded.

The hardware is all chrome-plated and includes ten chrome-over brass double-posted modern-style tube lugs, 2.5 mm triple flanged chrome-over brass counter hoops, and a nice fat "Summit Co. Ohio" labeled vent hole grommet. A Trick Three-Step throw-off and butt, and

20-strand Fat Cat snares round out the hardware. Evans coated G1 batter and a clear 300 snare side heads came standard.

Summit Drums also have a very distinct three-sided badge that keeps them from being confused from other drums at any distance. Each Summit Drum includes an identification label inside the drum that includes the serial number, date of birth, shell size, and the name of the series of the drum. Every drum is also signed by Gary Posey.

I found the sound somewhat complicated, which is a characteristic that I like. This drum was no-doubt built in the style of traditional steam bent, single-ply drums, which has long been very strongly associated with jazz music, and this is no doubt a very strong drum for playing that type of music. But I really liked it for a wide variety of playing styles. The "crack" was strong and did a fine job in Rock and Country styles, as well as many others. This drum performed very well for me.

The maple wood gave a warm, musical sound that projected nicely, and the solid wood style of the shell gave the sound a dry, tight, more controlled attack. The note width was medium wide with a seriously "vintage" vibe that I associate with that beautiful round-over style bearing edge. The depth and punch of this drum was penetrating, and the sensitivity was equally good at all volumes. I would attribute some of the over-all "warmth" and "musicality" to the choice of the brass hardware. Brass has a habit of sounding warmer and more musical than many other metals found on drums.

Summit Drums deal in a wide variety of woods and sizes, as well as construction of full drum sets. As a side note, I was able to sit behind a few of the drum sets and found the toms to be very full and resonate. The kicks had great punch and tone.

Most of us drummers typically take a particular personal pride in our choice of instruments. I always appreciate that there are small craftsman shops out there that create high-quality, small-batch instruments that perform as well or better than some of the well-known, high production options. It's certainly always a great opportunity to be unique.

Gary Posey, the craftsman behind Summit Drums, has put a lot of time, trial, and experience into creating the drums that *he* would like to play. I think these could be drums that *you* would want to play too. Summit Drums are extremely well-crafted, handmade drums that I've seen get better each time I come across them. This a drum company I will continue to keep my eye on. Street Price: $750.00. Check 'em out at: **summitdrums.myshopify.com/**

Mike Reid

Playing the Patterns with Justin Timberlake

Alex Kluft

By Mark Griffith

In today's pop music world, why does it seem that there are only a handful of drummers who are doing all of the top gigs? Why do pop stars like Janet Jackson, Rihanna, Charlie Puth, Alicia Keys, Demi Lovato, and Justin Timberlake hire drummer Mike Reid? And furthermore, who is Mike Reid? Mike is a humble, intelligent, trustworthy, talented drummer who is taking care of business! You might not recognize his name, but you have definitely heard and seen him play. Whether it's watching Mike as the house drummer for the *2023 Rock and Roll Hall of Fame* induction ceremony, or watching Rihanna at the Super Bowl halftime show, at the Oscars, and on her *Anti World Tour*; Mike has been doing major gigs and tours for years. He did several tours with Demi Lovato, Justin Timberlake's *Legends of Summer Tour*, and now Mike is preparing for Timberlake's upcoming 2024 tour, (simply put) Mike Reid is everywhere. *Modern Drummer* has finally gotten the opportunity to ask Mike all of these questions and get to know the drummer behind the kings and queens of pop music.

MD: There isn't a whole lot of information out there about you?
MR: For so long, I've been dialed in on my craft – I love learning and listening. But at the same time, it's also important to get your story out there and for people to be inspired by what you do. When I play, I harness a lifetime of experiences; I've been doing this since I was three. But I do feel that my story is unique because I never did this to get any accolades, fame, or attention.
MD: How did you start drumming?
MR: My mother is a singer, my dad is a piano player, and my grandfather was a pastor. I started early on with the drumsticks in my hands. There was an important time when I was three or four when my mom and my dad split up, my dad was in DC and my mom and I were still in Baltimore. My mom would always say, "Go practice drums." I think she liked having the noise around. I think it kept her happy, she liked the noise in the house to keep her attention off what was going on with her and my dad. At the time, I didn't understand that, but it was cool to be able to do whatever I could to help her. Coming up that was really a pinnacle moment. I would practice drums at home, banging on the seats in the car, it was cool, I could practice anywhere. From there, it just started becoming pretty fun to be able to create rhythm everywhere. I played drums in all the talent shows throughout school, and I played drums at my grandfather's church until I was 12. All this time I was developing on the drums. The singer Sisqo (of Dru Hill) used to live in the same area as me in Baltimore. Sisqo would be walking down our street while I was playing drums. I lived in a rough area, and the guys on the corner would always ask about that "little guy playing drums." They noticed that I had some rhythm, and they could always hear the drums coming out of the house.

I would practice drums at home, banging on the seats in the car, it was cool, I could practice anywhere. From there, it just started becoming pretty fun to be able to create rhythm everywhere.

When I was 12 years old, my dad took me to The Gospel Music Workshop of America and that's when I met Thomas Pridgen. That's when I really got exposed to the fact that there were guys that were not too much older than me that were going crazy on the drums and that were insanely good. This was before YouTube and stuff like that. Back then you didn't know what the drumming dynamic was outside of your area. I thought I was doing pretty good, but when I was exposed to what was going on nationally and internationally, I saw other drummers who were insanely great at that age. That's when it really started for me. It opened my eyes and noticed that there was another level out there.
MD: How did you take it to the next level after seeing Thomas?
MR: Thomas was really receptive to me, he took me under his wing for a week, and I learned a lot from him. That year I also saw Calvin Rogers play, that's when I first became inspired to do this for the rest of my life. I left that workshop being blown away. I saw Calvin with immense energy and going off, and I saw Thomas (who was a young superstar) and I started thinking, "That's what I want to be."

That year my dad wrote a song for the National Mass Choir, and they were doing a recording, and he allowed me to play the drums on the record. There's footage and everything of that. It's pretty cool, I'm playing a groove, there were a few little fills, but the song was kind of straight, so that's what I was doing, just grooving. My dad also let me play at a music conference in Baltimore where I met Eric Scott and Adam Johnson. They heard me play at that conference and thought, "This kid is pretty good." They told me about a festival that was happening in Switzerland called *Blues to Bop*. At the age of 13, they took me to that festival, and I got to play. That really opened my eyes, when I got back home the promoter wrote me a check for $1,000 bucks, and I thought, "Wait a minute, you can get paid to play music?" Throughout my whole life, I never thought about money, I never thought about playing music and getting paid. For me, it was just a getaway from whatever was going on at home. That is how everything started and that catapulted me to where I am today.
MD: What did you do to develop at the drums?
MR: I developed on the job throughout my whole life. Adam Johnson sat me down and asked if I knew who Dennis Chambers and Vinnie Colaiuta were. Around that time, I met drummer Sean Rickman from DC. I went over to Sean's house, and he played the Allan Holdsworth record called *Secrets* that Vinnie did. That record messed me up!
MD: That record messed lots of people up. What did Sean Rickman teach you?
MR: He was teaching me different polyrhythms, different rhythms, and odd time signatures. When I was in high school, I got the *Modern Drummer* tape of Vinnie playing at the MD Festival. I watched that tape every day, that's why it's kind of crazy for me to be doing this interview. That video really helped me in my life. The information that you guys offer has been very important to me, and it can help change people's lives.

I have to go back a step. Because a very important thing happened to me when I was around 15 and before I met Sean. Aaron Spears used to hold these Basement Jams at his house and a whole bunch of drummers would come over and jam. I miss Aaron dearly, he's a big part of my history. At one particular jam, Sput Searight was there with Paul "Buggy" Edwards, Tim Steele, Jamal Moore, Greg Clark… All of those guys used to come to the basement, and they are all very important to me. Sput was playing a shuffle in seven and doing some things I had never heard on the drums. At that jam, everybody was trying to pick up what Sput was playing. I picked up on the pattern that Sput was playing, and I was able to memorize it fairly quickly. Aaron said that I was one of the first ones to pick up and catch exactly what he was doing. That's when I learned something

about myself. Aaron noticed that my mind was like a computer and that I had a gift for recognizing and memorizing patterns. It was just the way my mind worked. From that day I started to focus on that gift. That (kind of) shifted my career and my drumming.

MD: Do you see patterns everywhere?

MR: Yes, I can't help it. I can meet somebody and after a little time, I can recognize their "patterns."

MD: Everyone has patterns, life is patterns. The easier (and quicker) you can see those patterns the easier life will be, I tell my drum students that all of the time.

MR: Yes, you can recognize patterns in people. In drumming, when you hear the Foo Fighters song "Pretender" you can hear how Taylor is playing different patterns in different sections of the song. He's playing the song from the inside out and using patterns to connect it. Patterns are how songs are written; it's how life works. Patterns tell the story. Because of my ability to recognize and remember patterns, I recognized that I had a gift to remember parts and changes.

MD: Listening to what's happening around you is the most important thing in playing music.

MR: Amen. When I was 16, I met Titus Robinson who asked me to play at a Gospel Festival in Africa. Since then, we have played on a few albums together and are still really great friends. At that same festival, I met Eric Tribbett. Eric heard me play and he asked me to fill in with an artist named Vivian Green who was signed to Columbia at the time. That's when I played my first gig with Adam Blackstone. Adam is one of the most phenomenal and gifted music directors I've ever worked with. He knows everyone's parts; he is just a genius in what he does and a super-talented guy. Since then, we've become great friends. He's the music director for a lot of the artists that I work with. Over the years, I've had to work hard and make things happen to get where I am today, but I'm very thankful to Eric and Adam.

MD: This might be a difficult question to answer, but has Adam ever told you specifically what he likes about your playing?

MR: That's a great question, I'll try to answer the best that I can. Adam knows what he's going to get when he hires me. He's going to get musical integrity, the drum parts are going to be played with attention to detail, and I won't overplay. I know Adam also likes consistency. With me, you're consistently going to get a great sound. I speak up if there's something not lining up that I hear. I always trust my ears to help in different situations. The musical director may be busy dealing with an artist directly or dealing with eight other things at the same time. If you can help in any capacity and make yourself an asset, versus waiting for people to tell you what to do, you become valuable to any musical situation.

Alex Kluft

MD: Just in talking to you, you sound like an intelligent guy, and I'm not saying you "have" to be intelligent to play drums, but the observations that you are making seem to come from a decent amount of intelligence and common sense.

MR: Thanks, that means a lot. I look at life this way, if you have a little intelligence, common sense, and are good at what you do, you can go a long way.

MD: But common sense is no longer common.

MR: Let me give you a real-time scenario, it's something that has actually happened to me. Let's say you're playing a show and an electronic pad stops working in the middle of a song, what do you do? I have three snares and a pad on stage. Which snare do I use if I'm playing an 808-trap sound on the pad that is now not working? Do I go to the big snare? Do I go to the deep snare? Or do I go to my ten-inch snare? Making decisions in real-time and being able to think fast; that's what they pay you for, problem solving. If something goes wrong, how fast can you react, stay calm under pressure, and solve the problem? That's my whole career, managing pressure, and solving problems.

I did the Super Bowl last year with Rihanna and being cool under pressure was what that gig was all about. And it's the same thing with this upcoming Justin Timberlake tour. When you play live in front of an audience there are no "do-overs." Can you manage that pressure? In my career that's really how I earn that trust with music directors, managing that pressure.

MD: That's the second time you have mentioned the word trust. Talk about establishing that trust within a band or with a musical director.

MR: I think trust is an underused word. Sometimes a music director may not have time for an audition, or they may not have time to rehearse, but can they trust you to show up in a situation and know for a fact, that they're going to be fine? That's where people and drummers have to work on some of their own skills. They must be sure that whatever's thrown their way, they won't get caught in a situation where they lose people's trust.

For me, it happened with reading music. Several years back, I went to see the *Jay Leno Show,* and Teddy Campbell was playing. We were talking afterward, and he stressed to me the importance of reading music. I didn't read at that point, and I was thinking, "OK, that's cool for Teddy, but I've been fine up until this point…" Then a situation happened, and I realized I was unprepared. That's when I learned to read music, and it has really helped me. Teddy was speaking the absolute truth.

I did a movie called *In the Heights* a couple of years ago, and Alex Lacamoire (who was Lin Manuel Miranda's musical director) was writing parts on the spot. There was no time to listen and learn the parts, you had to be able to read them on the spot. I also filled for Chris Johnson on a show called *The Four*. I did the first episode and there were 30 songs to learn for that episode alone and we didn't have much time to learn the songs. Thirty songs in a night or two may be hard to retain, so you must be able to chart them out and read the charts.

And to be honest, I used to watch Vinnie play and look at the charts on his stand (off to the left,) and I thought it looked pretty cool. I liked that he was able to sit down and play all that stuff and just be reading.

Mike's Recorded Works

These are the recordings that best represent Mike's drumming.

Rock and Roll Hall of Fame Concert (2023, 2018)
In the Heights (Original Movie Soundtrack) - Various Tracks (2022)
Dave Chappelle Mark Twain Prize - Common, John Legend (2019)
Janet Jackson, (*2018 Billboard Awards*)
Toni Braxton, (*2017 Soul Train Music Awards*)
HBO Concert for Valor, Jennifer Hudson (2016)
Donnie McClurkin, *The Journey Live* (2016)
Original Broadway Cast of Hamilton Soundtrack, "One Last Time" (2015)
UNCF Evening of Stars, Babyface (2015)
Jonathan Nelson, "My Name is Victory" (2008)
Alicia Keys, *Santa Baby Album* (2022)
Adam Blackstone, *Legacy Album* "The Instrumental Jawn" (2023)

MD: So how did you learn to read music?

MR: I downloaded an app called *Read Rhythm*, and for a year instead of getting on social media or whenever I would pick up my phone, I went right to my *Read Rhythm* app. I just challenged myself. I figured if I had time to pick up my phone and look at Instagram, I had time to play this reading rhythm game. After I played that reading rhythm game, it all just started making sense to me. It gives you different lessons and it has different levels, it starts in 4/4 and it progresses to different types of time signatures, it explains the notes and rests and it's kind of pattern based. So after seeing a pattern for a while, it starts to make sense. Then when you transfer that skill to reading sheet music, you've already seen the patterns. It's really all just patterns. That was a pretty wild development in my life and career. I enjoy reading music now.

MD: You hadn't read music at all until that point?

MR: No, it wasn't until I got into those situations, that I realized reading was necessary for me to go further and get to the level of my ultimate dream.

MD: Which is…

MR: I have always wanted to play for movie scores. I'm a big David Foster fan, one time I was sitting in the living room at my parent's house, and they had a *David Foster and Friends* DVD with John Robinson on drums. When I watched that, it messed me up. Throughout my whole life I've had these "a-ha moments," but that DVD was some of the most beautiful and melodic music that I've ever heard.

MD: Before you started reading were you memorizing everything?

MR: Again, it's the pattern thing… I just got comfortable with it. But let me go back and explain a few more things. I had my sights set on attending the Berklee School of Music, so I wanted to improve my sight-reading skills for a better audition. A fellow drummer named Mark Stewart recommended me to an excellent drum teacher named Grant Menefee, who is still a close friend of mine to this day. I had a great time with Menefee, but I faced a minor issue — I kept memorizing things that I was supposed to read because the patterns came swiftly to me. Grant would ask me, "Mike, did you memorize that again?" About a month into my training, I received a call for a tour that was happening. I decided to jump right into the industry. Fast-forward… I played on a song called "My Name is Victory" by Jonathan Nelson, and during that time I was watching the Sting *All This Time* DVD with Manu Katche' on drums. I noticed Manu was doing very subtle things to make each section of the song distinct and different, it just clicked with me. I identified that I needed to make songs distinct, I needed to make the verse different from the hook and the chorus, and everything had to sound distinct. When I watched what was happening on that DVD, I could identify every part of the song and what Manu was doing to make them different. When I played on "My Name is Victory" I was thinking about

how Manu was playing on that DVD with Sting. I have to give a shout out to my forever brothers Justin Savage, Kenny Shelton, and Adam Johnson who all played on that record with me. Darrell Robinson heard me on that track, he was the music director for Pharrell Williams at the time, Darrell called me and said, "I heard you on "My Name is Victory," you had so much room to play so much on that song, but you stuck to what the song needed." I didn't overplay, and Darrell appreciated that. After that, Darrell asked me to fill in with Pharrell and I later was hired for the gig. About a year or two after that, I was hired to play with another major artist. But the craziest thing happened with that artist, I got let go.

MD: Fired?

MR: It was a hard situation because it was new, and it wasn't the best situation to be in, but yes, I was let go. I don't know why and exactly what happened, but I caught the train home, and while I was on the train, I made a declaration to myself saying, "That will NEVER happen to me again for the rest of my life." That whole situation (kind of) gave me PTSD. Now I'm a little insane when it comes to music. When I'm on a gig, I fully dial in! I'm a nice and cool guy that everybody loves to be around, but when it's showtime, everyone knows to *leave Mike alone*, it's serious business. I'm focused, it's like I'm at war! I'm super intense, and every detail matters, I learn everyone's parts. I have that chip on my shoulder that you need to succeed in life. And that inspiration comes from the lessons that I learned from being let go. Whatever it was, I'm not going to let it happen again.

MD: Why do you think that happened that caused you to be let go?

MR: I was young, the rehearsal was on a Monday, and I got called on Friday. There were a lot of different parts to the

Aaron noticed that my mind was like a computer and that I had a gift for recognizing and memorizing patterns. It was just the way my mind worked. From that day I started to focus on that gift. That (kind of) shifted my career and my drumming.

music… Looking back, I never investigated the "why." That made me not create an excuse. Whatever it was, moving forward I was going to be super prepared for everything. I just did *SNL* with Justin Timberlake, and we were rockin' pretty hard. In preparation for that, I was studying and listening to Foo Fighters, Nirvana, Metallica… I was diving into whatever I had to engulf myself in that approach. When I dial in, it's a little insane and my preparation gets crazy.

MD: What you did with that situation is important. Because in this business, everyone has been fired (or let go.) All the greats, all the legends, everyone has been let go for some reason. But what you do after that is the important thing.

MR: After that, I got really serious and intense, I think I needed that push. Then I got called for the Joe Jonas gig and then the Demi Lovato gig. What people don't realize is that a negative situation can change your life. Up until that point, stuff was coming to me pretty easily. I never I had to fight for something. I never had that grit. But now I have that fight to succeed, and I can direct that situation into everything in my life. Now whenever I want something it becomes 100% tunnel vision and preparation.

I did the Super Bowl last year with Rihanna and being cool under pressure was what that gig was all about. And it's the same thing with this upcoming Justin Timberlake tour.

MD: I think everyone needs a little disappointment to be able to grow and develop a groove. I remember several years ago a drummer commented to me about how a very young drummer didn't have "a groove." I responded by saying, "Give him time, let him get dumped by his girlfriend, lose a job, have his car stolen, *whatever*… He's got to live a little to develop a groove."

MR: Yes, some things do take time. A little "life hitting you" will add to your emotion and groove all day long! I love listening to recordings of older drummers (like Bernard Purdie, Steve Gadd, and Jeff Porcaro) when they were younger. It's just a rabbit hole of old records and an insane study of going back.

I did a show a couple of months ago and we were on the bill with James Taylor. James asked us to sit in with the band, so I played with James Taylor, that was kind of mind-blowing. But you know me, I

Courtesy of Mike Reid

was doing my typical research, so I started studying how Gadd approached that music. It was so calm, reserved, laid back, and comfortable. That changed my playing. After that show background singer Dorian Holley and I were having dinner, and one thing he said about Gadd was that Steve plays, "beautiful drums." I had never heard that phrase before, and it caught me off guard, "beautiful drums." And I thought, "I want to play beautiful drums." Dorian said that in all the years he's played with Gadd, he's never heard anybody turn around and ask Gadd to give more, give less, or bring the dynamic up (or down). His drumming is always where it's supposed to be. Now that is my goal.

MD: In your James Taylor research, did you really go all of the way back and listen to Russ Kunkel, Rick Marotta, and Carlos Vega playing James' music?

MR: There you go, like I said, it's a rabbit hole of records and great drummers.

MD: So let's look back at all of these gigs that you have done, Justin Timberlake, Janet Jackson, Demi Lovato, Joe Jonas, Jay Z, Beyonce, Rihanna, Toni Braxton… How did all of that happen?

MR: After Demi Lovato, I was on vacation with my family and I got a call to fill in for Brian Frasier-Moore with Justin Timberlake on the Legends of the Summer Tour, I was 24 or 25 years old I explained the situation to my family, and I went home to prepare. I got called on a Wednesday, and they wanted me to be in New York to audition on Friday. I went home on Thursday, and I got on the drums. They wanted me to play the first half of the show at the audition, so I essentially had one day to just listen and learn it. You can't really digest that much music in one day, and I don't even know how I did it, but I dialed in the first half of the set in 24 hours and went up to New York on Friday. I played in front of everybody. Brian's drums were massive, electronics were everywhere. After I played, they asked me if I would rather just have Brian record the triggers and I could just play acoustic drums over them. Even though that would have been easier, I decided to take the harder route and replied, "No, I got it!" Later I thought, "What the heck did I get myself into?" But Brian was a great help during that time and a huge mentor moving forward to this day. We are really good friends and I believe my career started to shift after that experience.

MD: Between the first Justin Timberlake tour and this new one, a whole lot happened in your career, can we talk about that?

MR: I've been doing a lot of award shows recently. I did the *Oscars* with Rihanna, I have done the *Rock and Roll Hall of Fame* award show twice, and I've done a bunch of *Soul Train Music Awards*. All of these award shows have helped prepare me for playing a lot of different styles of music with different artists, all at one time. Playing with Justin and being able to dial into his songs intensely is something I'm looking forward to. When you're doing a show with 10 different artists you do the best that you can. But Justin knows every bit of every part, including drum parts of every one of his songs.

MD: Tell me about the Janet Jackson gig? I have loved her music since day one and *Rhythm Nation*. How do you approach that gig and her music?

MR: For starters, you've got Jimmy Jam coming out to make sure all the sounds are there and correct. Outside of that element, you have Janet being a true professional, she knows every part of every song because she's been playing them for 30 years. You can't hide on that gig. It all goes back to the studying and my insane practice based on patterns and details. Her whole gig is pattern-based. It's recognizing what to play over eight bars and being super consistent. One of the most important drum sections is the "Rhythm Nation" drum breaks. When you're playing a song like "Pleasure Principle" you are playing triplet patterns with your hands and different rhythms on the kick drum, and you have triggers on your drums, so the consistency has to be there. I'm very grateful to Daniel Jones (musical director- RIP) for giving me the opportunity. Thank you Daniel.

MD: Let's get into details. We don't have to mention any names, but what kind of details do you hear drummers missing when they are playing music?

MR: Take a tune like Chaka Khan's "Ain't Nobody," there are a lot of kick drum notes in that pattern, and if I hear someone play that and they miss some of the kick drum notes that's an example of missed details.

One of the biggest compliments that I've ever gotten was when I played the *Rock and Roll Hall of Fame* induction for LL Cool J. When people listened back to that, there was one cat that said, "The drummer was not really playing." To me, that was a big compliment. That means that I've blended so well with the track that you couldn't even tell I was playing.

MD: Transparency within the music…

MR: That's correct.

MD: If it's a non-triggered gig, how close will you try to get your drum and cymbal sound to what's on the record?

MR: I pay attention to the different tones of snare drums. You gotta know what era of music you're playing. If I'm playing 70s groove music, I use Steve Gadd's snare sound as a reference. I'll tune my main snare with a little more body. If you are playing 80s pop music, JR Robinson is the main cat. Your main snare sound would be a little deeper, just to cover the body of the music. If you are playing 60s James Brown funk, I'll tune my snare up a little higher. It's just listening and going back through the different eras of music and knowing where to pull from with each gig. You have got to listen, you have gotta have big ears because if you get it wrong, that will have a negative effect on the music. If you play a jazz gig you want to have an 18-inch kick and the high toms, if you are playing fusion,

Mike's Picks

These are Mike's favorite recordings

Allan Holdsworth, *Live: All Night Wrong* (Chad Wackerman)
Chick Corea, with Steve Gadd
Chroma, (Dennis Chambers)
Dave Weckl, *Master Plan*
Dennis Chambers, *In the Pocket* DVD
Fred Hammond, *Pages of Life* (Marvin McQuitty)
Janet Jackson, *Live in Hawaii* DVD (Brian Frasier-Moore)
Jill Scott, *Live the 8-26* (Erik Tribbett)
Kim Burrell, *Everlasting Life* (Doobie Powell)
Nina Simone, *Nina Sings the Blues* (Bernard Purdie)
Paul McCartney, *Back in the USA* (Abe Laboriel Jr.)
Phil Collins (anything)
Toto, *The Seventh One* (Jeff Porcaro)
Tony Williams Lifetime, *Believe It*
Usher, *Live* (Brian Frasier-Moore)
Vinnie Colaiuta, *solo record*
Anything with Questlove, JR Robinson, Ricky Lawson, Harvey Mason, Juju House

you need those big Tony Williams toms. It's about really listening to all the music that has come before you, being a music digester and a music connoisseur. The more you listen, the more you digest, and the easier it becomes to fit into every situation.

MD: When you have achieved the right "physical sound" for the music, how does that affect how you play on the gig?

MR: The sound will affect how you play, your drumsticks will affect how you play, and very recently I have found that my kick drum mallet affects how I play. There's a song of Justin's where I needed to change my kick drum mallet. The weight of the beater was distributed differently, and it was affecting the way I was playing the bass drum pattern. I switched to a felt mallet and I was able to distribute the weight more easily. With more weight, I could get more power. If something is not working, you really must do a diagnostic on what is wrong. We all know how music works…

MD: Tell me something specific that you have learned from a Musical Director.

MR: Here's a good tip: Never get comfortable. Always be on your game.

MD: When we were talking about this interview, you were preparing for Justin Timberlake's appearance on Saturday Night Live, and you were mentioning really listening to a bunch of hard and heavier rock music. Has Justin's gig gotten "heavier?"

MR: That song is heavy and really rockin'. With Justin, music is never in a box. On *SNL* there were some big Dave Grohl flams at the beginning and at the end we go to a hard rock Zeppelin type of groove. But there is some Trap 808 and church stuff on the new tune called "Sanctified." Justin can incorporate all of that into one song which he does beautifully. Then we do a song called "Senorita" which is a Latin type of thing with a drum solo in the middle. From what I've heard so far from the new record it's very diverse.

MD: You are preparing to do Justin's 2024 tour which is starting in April, and you have done some live appearances playing some stuff from the new record. Do you get the new music well in advance to start preparing for the tour or the SNL appearance?

MR: No, because some of the music has not been released yet, and they are quite cautious about releasing it. Therefore, there isn't a lot of preparation time.

MD: How has Justin's gig changed since you did it last, because it's been about 10 years right?

MR: About ten years, yes. Now I know that I have to make it my own. Before, I had to find a hybrid between what was already established. Now it's a whole new album, and everything that's recreated live will be my interpretation of the new music.

MD: How do you go about recreating drum parts from a record while still putting your own personality on the songs?

MR: You gotta perform and really adapt to the person's style that played the record. When you listen enough times, you recognize the patterns of when they go to the ride on the bridge, how is their time, and how do they hit their toms… Rhythmically, everyone plays their drums with a different dynamic. Maybe they use bigger sticks, or maybe they use wider-toned snare? So you have to put yourself close to what is happening on the recorded tracks, just so everybody's comfortable. Change is good, reinventing the wheel is cool and I'm all for it. But when the artist is comfortable with a sound for 10 years, you need to slowly and very gradually, change things. It's gotta be a slow burn, you gotta make sure you change things gracefully and over time. That will inevitably happen because we're two different drummers. Everybody plays differently, it's in our hands, we could play the exact same beat on the exact same drum set and it will sound different because we're different people.

MD: Will you, or how do you, change your gear from gig to gig, have you changed anything for this new tour with Justin?

MR: The sound that I am getting now is I pretty much dialed into what I need no matter the gig. My sound is pretty similar between gigs. DW makes drums that fit everything that I do. They're so easy to tune, as soon as I sit down, I can make very few adjustments and I've got my sound. Sometimes being in these situations, I don't have a lot of time. I haven't been in a situation yet where these drums don't fit in the music. If I need some more low-end, I'll throw on some coated heads, if I need a nice pop sound, I typically go with some clear Emperors, and I'm dialed right in.

MD: What size drums are you using?

MR: I've got 8, 10, 12, 16, 18, toms, a 22" kick, my main snare is either all maple or a 14" Top Edge Brass and Maple snare, I use a 7x14 brass side snare, and either a 12 or a 10" Maple popcorn snare to get my high trap snare sounds.

MD: And how about cymbals?

MR: I've been playing Sabian since 2019. I'm using the Legacy's and the Evolution's. In arenas, I use 18" Crashes, 22" Legacy ride, and 14 or 15" hats.

MD: You have mentioned consistency a few times, how have you achieved this amount of consistency throughout your career so far?

MR: Because it wasn't a fast thing for me, it has taken a lifetime. At this point, the things I know I can't unlearn. They're in there because of the hours and the years I have put in. The years of experience are a part of me, you play what you're going to play because you have put in the time. Once you've done something long enough, you'll start to hear yourself sound the same on things and you'll know why something sounded good. That's consistency, and there's no race to get there. You could be 45 years old and just get your big break, but you've got to be ready. After a while consistency will happen because at that point you trust yourself in any situation. You already know how you're going to sound. I'm not sure if you can get there fast.

MD: What are you practicing today?

MR: I've been focusing on playing more laid-back with the timing. During a recent recording session, I noticed a tension in my performance and realized I wasn't breathing normally. Despite being in the studio with ample time, I decided to take a deep breath, relax, and the recording came out like I wanted it to sound in my head. I've been working on translating that

> When you listen to Purdie, Porcaro, or Gadd those guys can lay back and make every transition in every song sound smooth.

relaxed approach to my live performances. I made a conscious decision not to let the size of the arena or the number of people, be it 20 or 30 thousand, affect me. Now, when I play live, I aim to maintain the same relaxed state as if I were in my studio. Initially, it wasn't natural to play that relaxed, but over time, I've learned to incorporate it into my performance.

MD: How did you learn that?

MR: I learned it by listening to myself and noticed that I prefer not to play on top of the beat. You gotta be smooth, you gotta be groovy, and you gotta find your groove. When you listen to Purdie, Porcaro, or Gadd those guys can lay back and make every transition in every song sound smooth. When you go around the toms just take a deep breath, we'll get there, it will be fine. But don't rush, unless the song calls for it.

MD: If you do need to play on top because the music is asking for it, how do you manifest that approach?

MR: That is the magic of music and drums. You have to keep learning; you learn how to adapt to different situations. I believe tempo and laying back (or playing on top) are not the same thing. You can push the tempo and lay back at the same time, I just prefer the time a little behind.

I learned this from a trumpet player named Dontae Winslow, horn players need time to blow their breath out of their body and through their horns to create a sound. When you have parts with air you gotta allow time for that air to travel, so I feel like everything sticks more when you give everybody time. A singer has to breathe too, I can hit as fast as I want to, but for horns and vocals, it takes time. This is what I mean when I talk about details and humility. Over the years that means paying attention to different things that make you valuable and paying attention to the sound. Practicing the things you can't do. Through years of research and studying myself, that is what I am working on.

You hear something new every day. You start a new project, and you hear and learn something new. I've been listening to the Dobbie Brothers recently, I never listened to them before, but they are grooving hard. I'm listening to Hall and Oates with Bernard Purdie from the 70s. Music is endless, but now I feel like things are organically coming my way because of the work that I've put in. You and I could talk for hours about this stuff because I'm not in music for what I can get out of it, I've dedicated my life to music, and I'm doing it because it's what I love to do.

I heard Anthony Jackson say this about Steve Gadd once, "Steve is so great because he's happy being a drummer." That meant a lot to me, because so many musicians can get caught up in trying to be multi-instrumentalists or producers, and that's fine and amazing. I'm in awe of those guys. But I'm really impressed by people who have mastered their own instrument and have mastered the craft of what they do. Those are the specialists, and you asked about consistency, I think you get to that professional level of consistency by being a specialist.

You have to satisfy yourself first in life. Be the best version of yourself that you can be, that's what matters. When you put everything into that, then you know your motives and your heart is in the right place. Things will blossom when you are doing things for the right reasons, there is no jealousy in my heart. I'm happy for everybody that gets to do what they love. Playing pop music and recreating different people's records on stage with triggers is something that God gifted me to do. You must be confident and comfortable with what you're doing and just be the best you can be. When you stay focused on that, that's when the world opens up, and you carve out your own lane.

Check out Mike's drummer profile page, at moderndrummer.com

Courtesy of Mike Reid

Ralph Rolle

Laying it Down and Taking Care of Business with Chic

By Mark Griffith

There are several intimidating drum gigs that a drummer can step into, but I'll mention one that might not come immediately to mind. The iconic band Chic. The original drum chair was manned by the legendary powerhouse drummer Tony Thompson, and after his death the (equally as legendary) Omar Hakim manned the throne for a while. I saw Chic in the 90s with Omar and I was absolutely FLOORED.

Sitting down behind the drums and playing such influential music as the Chic catalog, is not a gig for the weak hearted. 18 years ago, drummer Ralph Rolle took over for Omar, and the Chic groove has been in good hands ever since. The groove was created by the legendary rhythm section of bassist Bernard Edwards, drummer Tony Thompson, and Chic's bandleader the renowned guitarist-producer Nile Rodgers. The music that Chic created in the 70s moved an entire generation. Disco was (and is) good time party music that made people dance, groove, and smile; and Chic was one of its most creative inventors. Chic authored the groove that would create dance hits such as "Dance, Dance, Dance, (Yowsah, Yowsah, Yowsah,)" "Le Freak," "Everybody Dance," and "Good Times." Chic's classic sound went on to be a major ingredient of the sound of artists like Sister Sledge, Diana Ross, David Bowie, Madonna, and The Power Station. Today, Chic featuring Nile Rodgers is still filling up dance floors, arenas, and putting smiles on people's faces, and drummer Ralph Rolle is at the center of it all!

Before Chic, Ralph was the drummer for NBC's *Showtime at the Apollo* for 17 years, the drummer for *BET Honors*, and the drummer for the *Caroline Rhea Show* on ABC. He has played for Al Green, Wayman Tisdale, Biggie Smalls, and D'Angelo. He gets to really cut loose on the soundtrack to the award-winning documentary *On the Ropes*, he is also a voice over artist, producer, and a teacher. On top of all of that, he also owns a cookie company called Soul Snacks. But today, it's all about Chic!

Kousuke Funaya

RR: Chic is a very special organization, I've been fortunate to play with a lot of different acts, but my concept of what music is, is not just the music, it's the organization as well. It's the band, it's the camaraderie, it's the love we all have for each other. Chic is a very rare situation, to be here is just crazy, we all get along so great, we have so much fun on and off stage, it's almost surreal, it really is just a beautiful thing.

MD: What is your musical background, where did you come up?

RR: I came up in New York, I was raised in the Bronx River Projects, I started playing drums at around eight or nine. My brother Howie was the drummer in the family before me. He was also the male role model in the house, so whatever my brother did, I did. He started playing drums and the drum set was in our bedroom in between our two beds. My mother was a very strict lady, she ran the house with an iron fist. She was a single parent with four kids. Now I know why the drums showed up in the house, because my brother was always getting in something and my mom knew that if she heard the drums, my brother was home and not getting into trouble.

MD: That's an interesting reason to want your kids to play drums, you'll always know where they are when they are playing drums at home.

RR: That's how I ended up playing drums, I started as a kid, and I listened to all the music that my older brother listened to. I was a big Motown head, I listened to gospel, the Last Poets, my musical training came from honing in on the music that he loved, and in turn, I started to love. But I am also left-handed, and my brother wouldn't let me turn the drums around, so I have always played open-handed. In Chic, I am also playing percussion with my left hand while playing grooves and fills with my right hand and singing.

MD: You were playing drums along with records, did you eventually take lessons or join the band at school?

RR: No, there wasn't the affordability to take lessons, I did what a lot of people did. I just simulated all the grooves and the drummers on the records that I heard. I learned those grooves. The very first groove I learned, and the beat that I (still) play constantly was the Beatles "She Loves You," that was my go-to. Ringo Starr is my first big influence. I saw him on the *Ed Sullivan Show* as a kid. What I loved about Ringo is that he looked like he was having the best time in the world. I just gravitated towards that, and I still do. The Beatles were a big influence, and Ringo really had a big impression on me. The next thing that caught my ear was Motown, and everybody that was playing Motown music.

MD: What Motown music was really grabbing you?

RR: A lot of Temptations and Marvin Gaye. I love all of the early Motown stuff, but I also loved when they got into the 70s with

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the different producers. *Psychedelic Shack* was one of my favorites. I'm a groove guy, I love just sitting in the groove, my favorite drummers are the groove guys like Clyde Stubblefield, Steve Gadd, Harvey Mason, and Bernard Purdie.

On the other side of the coin, I would have loved to have grown up during the big band era. I just love listening to drummers like Chick Webb and Buddy Rich. What appealed to me is the fact that the big band drummers have so much control over the band, they lead you everywhere. I remember the first time that I heard Count Basie's band, the drummer took the band to places that were simply amazing. Anytime that I have the opportunity to play any songs from that era, I am ecstatic.

MD: Which Basie drummers really did it for you? There were so many, and they were all very different.

RR: The first time I saw Basie was in the 60s, and I'm not sure who was playing drums at that time.

MD: It was probably either Sonny Payne or Harold Jones. Both were amazing with Basie in the 60s, but they had different approaches. However, everyone that came to Basie after Sonny Payne was just walking in his very large footsteps.

RR: A big band drummer always has the ability to lead the band in and out of accents with his fills. When I'm teaching my Master Classes I talk about how a drummer is always the leader of the band, even if you're not the musical director or the leader. But listening to those great big band drummers was amazing. I think you're right; I think it was Sonny Payne, he knocked me out!

MD: How did your drumming interest progress?

RR: I came home one day, and the drums were gone. I found my brother and asked him what he had done with the drums. He was dating this girl and She was having his baby and they were going to move in together. He told me this whole long story about their relationship, and all of this positive stuff. After he finished his long-winded speech, I just said, *"Yeah, but what about the drums?"* That was ALL I cared about. He finally told me that he had sold them to get money for an apartment. I was really mad. The drums and playing drums had really gotten ahold of me, so I made it a point to become friends with everybody in my neighborhood that played drums. My mother couldn't afford to buy a set, so I just played on other people's drums. I was a kid that never said never. I made a deal with my mother. I saved enough money to buy me some drums. I made my money by packing bags at the local grocery store. I volunteered at the local music store because that's where the drums were. I went to the library to listen to music because I just wanted to totally immerse myself with drums and music. But I was lucky that I also found drum corps. I always felt like if I put in the work and the time, I could make it happen, even without a drum set. I finally saved enough money to buy a drum set. The music store where I volunteered sold me a Clear Ludwig Vistalite set at dealer cost because I had been working so hard there. That was a really nice thing for them to do, and my mom agreed to pay for the cymbals. I played those drums every day after school until my hands felt like they were gonna fall off. I would put on a song

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that I liked, and I would record myself playing along with that song.

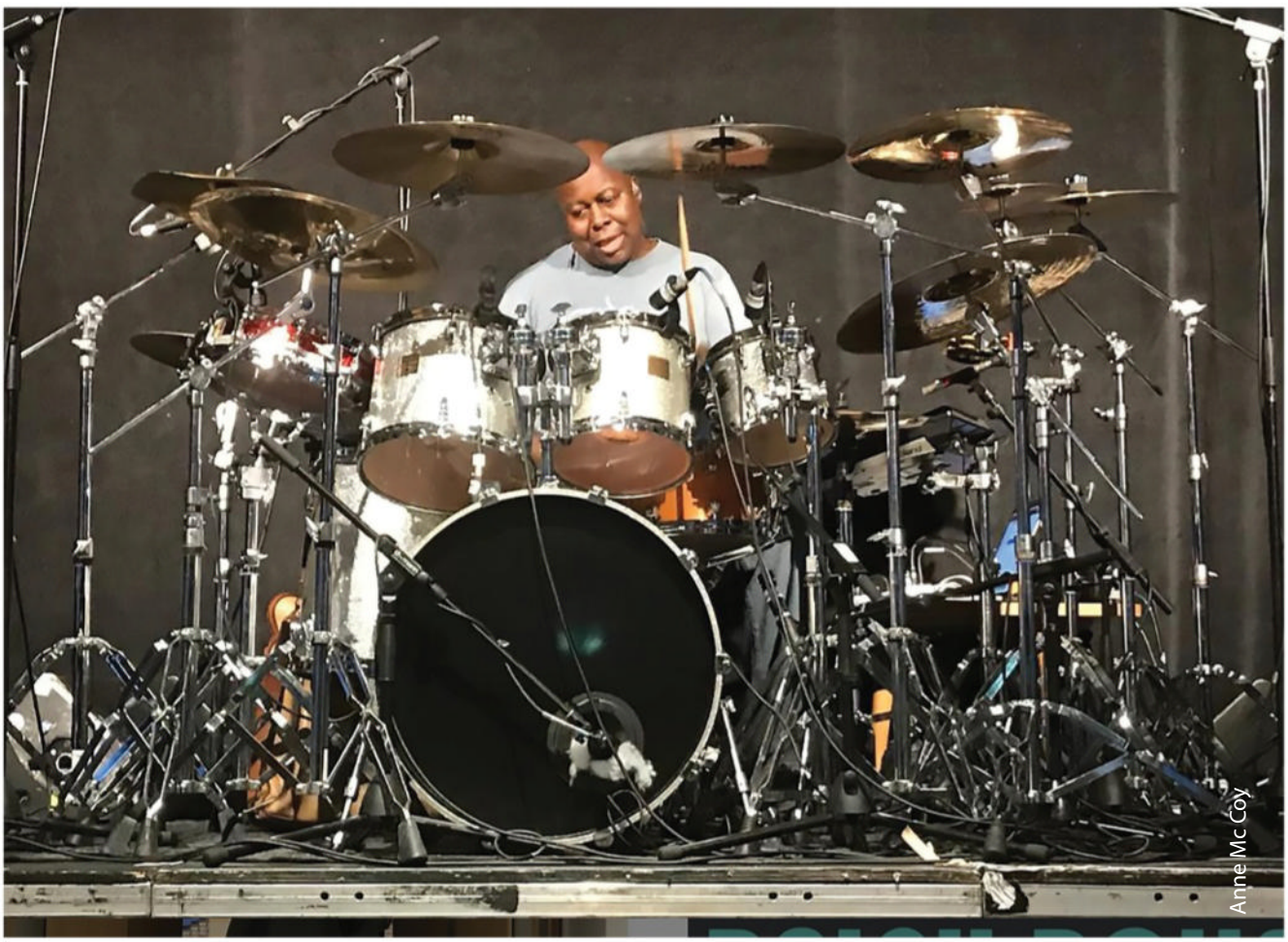
MD: Just to be clear, we're talking about playing a record, playing along to that record, and recording it with a little tape recorder, right?

RR: Yeah, old school. I would listen back to my recordings to hear how well I did. I didn't realize it at the time, but I was teaching myself. My ears and my performances got better by being honest with myself. I was listening to the nuances of the things that I did right, and the things that I did wrong. I would re-record myself playing the same song, and that repetition trained my ears not only as a drummer but also as a teacher. When I turned 18, there was a professional drummer (and singer) named Wade "Puggy" Taylor that lived on the first floor, he was working with a group called Musique, they had a big hit at the time called "Push, Push, In the Bush." He heard me playing one day and said I sounded good. He also told me about an audition for Musique and thought I should go. I told him yes but he had to ask my mother. He did, and she said yes, I could go. I went to the audition and was scared to death, but I played the music, and I got the gig. That was my first time playing with a professional group, my first time with a passport, my first time on a plane, and my first time out of the country. I turned 19 while we were on the tour in Mexico. My career kind of snowballed from there. However, it wasn't a quick growing snowball, it was a snowball that took turns growing and melting, but it eventually grew. After Musique, I started playing with a local band called, Indigo. Then I got the gig with Evelyn "Champagne" King who had a big hit called "Love Come Down." I did her gig for about two years.

What I loved about Ringo is that he looked like he was having the best time in the world. I just gravitated towards that, and I still do.

After that came other gigs with Najee, Freddie Jackson, Glenn Jones, Sherry Winston, Oran "Juice" Jones and many others. I started doing sessions while I was still teaching drum corps around the city.

The local drummers that were doing all of the gigs back then were Yogi Horton, Buddy Williams, and Omar Hakim. I would look at the Village Voice newspaper, and those guys had every



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gig. I knew that I was basically the same age as this "Yogi guy" and almost the same age as Buddy and Omar. I knew that if I played my cards right and worked my ass off, I could get those gigs too.

MD: Let's go back a little, what drum corps were you involved in?

RR: It's when I joined the drum corps that my trajectory changed. My very first drum corps that I was a member of was the New York Knickerbockers, that's where I learned how to play rudiments. I moved on to the Falcon Cadets out of Elizabeth, NJ. and became one of the top drummers in the line. I entered and won a lot of individual competitions. I taught myself how to read, and then I started teaching and writing for ensembles with my mentor, Rickey Mangum. I

Everyone in the Apollo band was muti-tasking and doing a multitude of things. Like drum corps, playing the gig at the Apollo was a good training ground on a lot of levels.

Kousuke Funaya

eventually auditioned for the Bayonne Bridgemen, and I passed the audition, but I didn't like the drum line. I started playing and teaching for the New York Lancers in the Bronx. I have always been very interested in drum corps, and still follow the activity to this day.

MD: What did you learn from drum corps?

RR: I've tried to pass a lot of the information I learned in drum corps on to drummers and musicians in general. The core element in my Master Classes are subjects like camaraderie, discipline, working together, style, and distinction. I do love teaching, and I try to pass on those as best I can. I'm just trying to teach the younger musicians how important being a musician is and to not ever take that for granted. It's a privilege and an honor to be a musician, and you should always try to uphold that honor. In my Master Classes I talk about (what I call) the Five P's: Passion, Power, Placement, Performance, and Purity. I continue to work with those elements in my musical and my personal life, and my businesses. That's what I took away from drum corps.

MD: How do you feel an education in drum corps and its approach to drumming specifically transfers to the drum set?

RR: Rudimentally, if you know how to transfer that information to a kit it can be very beneficial. When you develop that control over your hands, feet, and head, you learn things quicker. I developed the understanding of what it took to do that from

the discipline of drum corps. There's a lot of guys that I know that were very much into drum corps, but they didn't know how to translate that information to a kit. They were so into the technical side of drum corps drumming that the musicality just didn't come across in their drumming. But when I found out that Steve Gadd (one of my favorite drummers) was in drum corps, and when I heard the way he played, I thought, "That's what I'm talking about!" If you listen to his drumming, he's taking the rudiments and applying them to the kit, and he does it with so much swag! As soon as I heard him, I knew that was how I wanted to sound. It's a big plus to have the ability to translate those ideas from drum corps to the drum kit.

MD: You mentioned Yogi Horton, Buddy Williams, and Omar Hakim. Most drummers today know about Omar, he's a legend. But tell the drummers out there about Yogi and Buddy, they are very important drummers. Buddy has played with David Sanborn, Luther Vandross, Dave Grusin, Lee Ritenour, and Hugh Masekela. I remember thinking that I had finally "made it" because I got replaced on a gig by Buddy Williams, I was so happy!

In the 18 years of me being in Chic, what you hear is a combination of Tony, Omar, and me. And I hope what you hear makes you want to dance.

RR: That's funny. I'm sure we both grew up reading the back of album covers like other kids read the back of cereal boxes. I wanted to know everyone that was playing on every record. But I kept seeing the same names on all the records that I liked, and one of those names was Buddy Williams. The names Buddy Williams and Allan Schwartzberg were on so many records, but I just didn't know who they were. I just loved the way he (Buddy) laid it down, he's got a thing that's great but indescribable. Many years had gone by, and I ran into a guy coming out of my building wearing a Zildjian t-shirt. I asked him if he was a drummer, and he said no but I'm the drum tech for Buddy Williams. I asked if he meant *THE* Buddy Williams? His name is William "Butch" Watson and we have been friends now for nearly 30 years. He introduced me to Buddy. I still remember when Butch introduced us. I am such a fan of all drummers. I just couldn't believe I was talking to *THE* Buddy Williams. Buddy and I are still very tight. He loves the cookies from my company. There are a lot of people who know the drumming on hit songs that Buddy played on, but they don't know who the drummer is. You're right…he's a legend. Luther Vandross' song "Never Too Much" is a first take of Buddy and bassist Marcus Miller. As recording drummers many times it's our job to leave enough space for others to come in later. We don't have to fill up all of the holes with our "drum glue," we need to leave space and air for others to come in later and be a part of the sound of the ensemble. That's where less is more comes from, and Buddy does that as good as anybody.

MD: What are a couple of your other favorite Buddy Williams recordings?

RR: One of my favorite Buddy Williams records is "Funkin' for Jamaica (NY)" by Tom Browne, another one is "Keep On" by D. Train along with "Never Too Much". Those are my top three favorite songs that Buddy played on. If you listen to those songs, you'll hear a very distinctive Buddy Williams groove.

MD: You replaced Buddy Williams on the *Showtime at the Apollo* gig, tell me about that gig,

RR: I started doing *Showtime at the Apollo* in 1993. Buddy Williams was too busy. He always had a lot of stuff going on, so they wanted someone that was more local and more permanent. That ended up being a 17-year gig at the Apollo. That was a great proving ground on a lot of levels. When we recorded the TV show, a lot of people don't know this, but we recorded the entire season in one four-day weekend. It helped that I knew how to read and knew how to program, because sometimes we were called upon by the musical director to help program stuff for the show. Russell Graham (keyboardist in Chic) actually did a lot of the programming for the show. Everyone in the Apollo band was muti-tasking and doing a multitude of things. Like drum corps, playing the gig at the Apollo was a good training ground on a lot of levels.

MD: Let's talk about playing in Chic. You are walking in some huge footprints: Tony Thompson and Omar Hakim. And you are playing with a living musical legend in Nile Rodgers.

RR: Working with Nile Rodgers is a very happy place. He gives a lot of respect to everyone in the band. He is never breathing down your neck about what to play and what not to play. You and I have both been in situations where the bandleader is on you about every little thing that you play. Nile is NOT one of those people. When he hires you, he hires you because he respects what you do, and he wants to hear what you bring to the equation. He's always very open about if he wants something changed. If he hears something he'll just tell you, but I have never heard Nile say to anyone that he didn't like what you played. He will suggest something different in a way that is more positive, because as you know, musicians are very sensitive.

MD: I'm sure that sensitivity comes from his life as a producer.

RR: There you go! When I came into to the to the Chic organization, I knew I had some big shoes to fill. When I come into any band, I have to learn a repertoire of songs. I listen to what was played live, and I listen to what was recorded in the studio. I try my best to give the best of both worlds in my interpretation of the music because it's never about me, it's always about the music. In the 18 years of me being in Chic, what you hear is a combination of Tony, Omar, and me. And I hope what you hear makes you want to dance.

I've never thought of people looking at me playing the drums. I don't care if you ever look at me. I care that you listen to the music, and you love what's going on, that's my goal. It ain't got nothing to do with me. I tell young musicians to listen to the song, ask the song what to play, you need to talk to the song. Ask the song, "What do you need here? What are we doing here? Let's figure it out together, and let's make it happen!" It's never about somebody standing backstage and saying, "Did you hear that 32nd note fill the drummer just played?" That never

mattered to Buddy Williams and that never mattered to Steve Gadd. What matters to all of the drummers that I love is what they give to the music, what is the music telling them and me to play? That's how I approach everything.

MD: I have always loved Tony Thompson's drumming, and there is probably nobody on earth that has listened to Tony Thompson more than you. What can you teach me about Tony's drumming?

RR: The thing about Tony is that you always feel a sense of rock'n'roll with Tony. A lot of R&B drummers didn't have that. When Tony played, there was a lot of power in his groove. Other drummers of that time had more of a funk R&B laid back style of drumming. But Tony was playing more of a funk rock style of drumming. The blend between Tony, Bernard, and Nile was amazing. It just had this sound that always worked on everything they played. That sound was so distinctive, and when Tony went over to The Power Station, that really let Tony accentuate his rock approach that he didn't do when he played Chic music. Tony played slightly in front of the beat which gave the beat more energy. When I'm playing with Chic now, I recognize that fact, so I'm always pushing a little bit because that's what Nile likes. When you push a little it creates a more energetic groove. If you listen back to Tony, you'll hear that in his pocket. When they did those records, they never used a metronome, there was a lot of expand and contract and swell and relax in the groove, and that always works. That's exactly what we're doing when we're playing Chic music. It's very important for me to accentuate the sound that Tony had.

With Omar, I feel there was a challenge. Omar and I have never talked about this, but when Omar was in Chic, I feel he was challenged because he was playing with a percussionist that was all over the place. When I heard Omar in Chic, it felt like he was fighting against the percussionist because there was so much percussion going on, and I felt for him. I think he would have done it differently if he wasn't fighting for space with the percussionist. Omar made it great though.

MD: We've all been on gigs when the percussionist feels the obligation to fill up every space possible. But I still think that Omar was absolutely killing it in Chic.

RR: Yes he was, but I feel that if he was playing by himself he would have done it differently, that's all I'm saying. However, because Omar is an absolute professional and he was complimenting the music, he figured out the best way to do it

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within those parameters.

MD: Was there a percussionist used on any of the original Chic records?

RR: There was occasionally percussionist's that were brought in.

MD: And you mentioned that there was no clicks or machines used on those Chic records.

RR: Not that I know of, and not that Nile has told me about, no. Today when we play live, we don't use any sort of click either. There is some push and pull live, but we are always going on feel and groove and the "feel of the day," and the music always feels great live.

MD: What are some of your favorite Tony Thompson and Chic tracks to listen to and to play?

RR: "Good Times" is definitely a lot of fun to play, but "I Want Your Love" is my favorite, I love playing that. I also love to play David Bowie's "Let's Dance" and Duran Duran's "Notorious" which were both produced by Nile Rodgers. Another fun song to play is "Chic Cheer" because if you listen to it, (for me) it puts you in the mind of George "Funky" Brown and the Kool and the Gang groove. There's a lot of space in that song, and that takes discipline, live or in the studio, leaving space takes a lot of discipline.

MD: What did you pick up from Omar when you walked onto this gig after him?

RR: When I first got the gig, I was sent the video of Chic *Live at Montreux*. That's what I learned from. I needed to learn the segues between tunes. I applied those segues and I still use some of the same segues that Omar used in what we do now. My takeaway from how Omar did this gig was how he transitioned from song to song. I'm not trying to reinvent the wheel; I just want to put some steel belted radial tires on. Omar did a great job and I want to accentuate what he did, like I said it's not about me it's about the music. If it worked and if it still works to this day, then it's gonna keep working. I don't get bored and need to change the grooves on these classic songs. It's always about the groove. If you go back and listen to some of the Chic *Live at Montreux*, you'll hear some of the same in's and out's of songs, because that's what works and who am I to say it doesn't work anymore. It worked then and it works now, and people love it.

MD: What kind of drums and cymbals are you playing?

RR: I am playing Yamaha and I have an Oak PHX series kit. I love oak over any other wood because it's not only punchy but it's warm and punchy. I use Remo Ebony Pinstripe heads that sound really good with those drums. It also helps that I have a drum tech who's a drum maniac. Martin Oldham, he was Charlie Watts drum tech, and he runs the UK Drum Show.

MD: You are playing with the most legendary rhythm guitar player EVER. Can you talk about the relationship between the drums and rhythm guitar?

RR: Nile is a percussive rhythm guitarist. I love the way he plays. I keep my grooves tight which gives him something funky to sit on. I will hold that groove so it's not constantly changing. He likes that and I like that. One of the things about Nile Rodgers and practically everyone in Chic is that we are all night club players. We all came out of the clubs in New York City. The goal is to pack the dancefloor. When you're playing clubs, you might have five people in the club one night, but you're playing like you are in a sold-out arena at all times. Nile, (bassist) Jerry Barnes, and I came up in the day of travelling in vans with the bands that we played in with our equipment, driving 100 miles for a $50 gig. Playing after-hours spots until 11:00 in the afternoon. That was our training ground. When we're on stage, I'm always watching Jerry.

Closing your eyes does give you that extra sensory perception of what is needed and necessary in the groove, but when you get there, you need to open your eyes to see the folks around you and get the body language that's going on.

When I teach, I'm always telling drummers, "If you're not watching the bass player everywhere he goes, then you are not doing your job." When we're on-stage Nile will turn around and get into a pocket with me and Jerry, and when it clicks, it clicks. It's magical, the groove gets going and every now and then you'll see Nile just laugh out loud for what the audience may think is no reason. That's because the groove just got so incredible that the only thing you can do is laugh. When you are playing with the right bass player you can get so deep into the groove that the bassist can apply a different paint brush to the canvas. Jerry is disciplined enough to know just how much to put in, he'll do something really cool and get out while Nile and I are holding it down.

MD: It's a three-way conversation. Can you talk about locking in with a bassist?

RR: I've worked with some great bass players over the years, and Jerry is about the meatiest bass player I know. Jerry plays with a lot of fat and he's fearless. You can hear it in his performance. It is our goal is to get the bottom so tight that you can build any house on top of that foundation. If you watch us play, if we're not looking at each other, then there's something that is not right. My eyes are following him around the stage like we are having a bromance. When he's playing, I gotta have not only the visual of him, but the sound. That lock must remain consistent. What people don't know is that at the beginning of every song we check with each other, and we give each other the nod when we know it's there, and if it's not there, we make the adjustments and then we give each other the nod. That happens in every song and at every show.

I get frustrated if I go to a show and I see the drummer kind of staring off somewhere and he's not watching the bass player.

I (almost) want to go a stop the show and ask him, "What the hell are you doing?" I can understand having your eyes closed for a minute because that's important to activate your other sensibilities, but not the entire show. I learned about groove from a drummer in my neighborhood named Ricky Williams. Ricky was blind and he would groove you into the ground. My introduction to how to groove was the blend that Ricky had between his hi-hats, kick, and snare. When I went to his house to watch him play, I would close my eyes to emulate Ricky, and I would listen to his amazing groove. That's how got to understand how locked in he was to the kick, snare, and hi-hat. I named it "The Blend." That's the sonic relationship between the kick, snare, and hi-hat. Closing your eyes does give you that extra sensory perception of what is needed and necessary in the groove, but when you get there, you need to open your eyes to see the folks around you and get the body language that's going on.

MD: You really feel and see that on your recent *Tiny Desk Concert*.

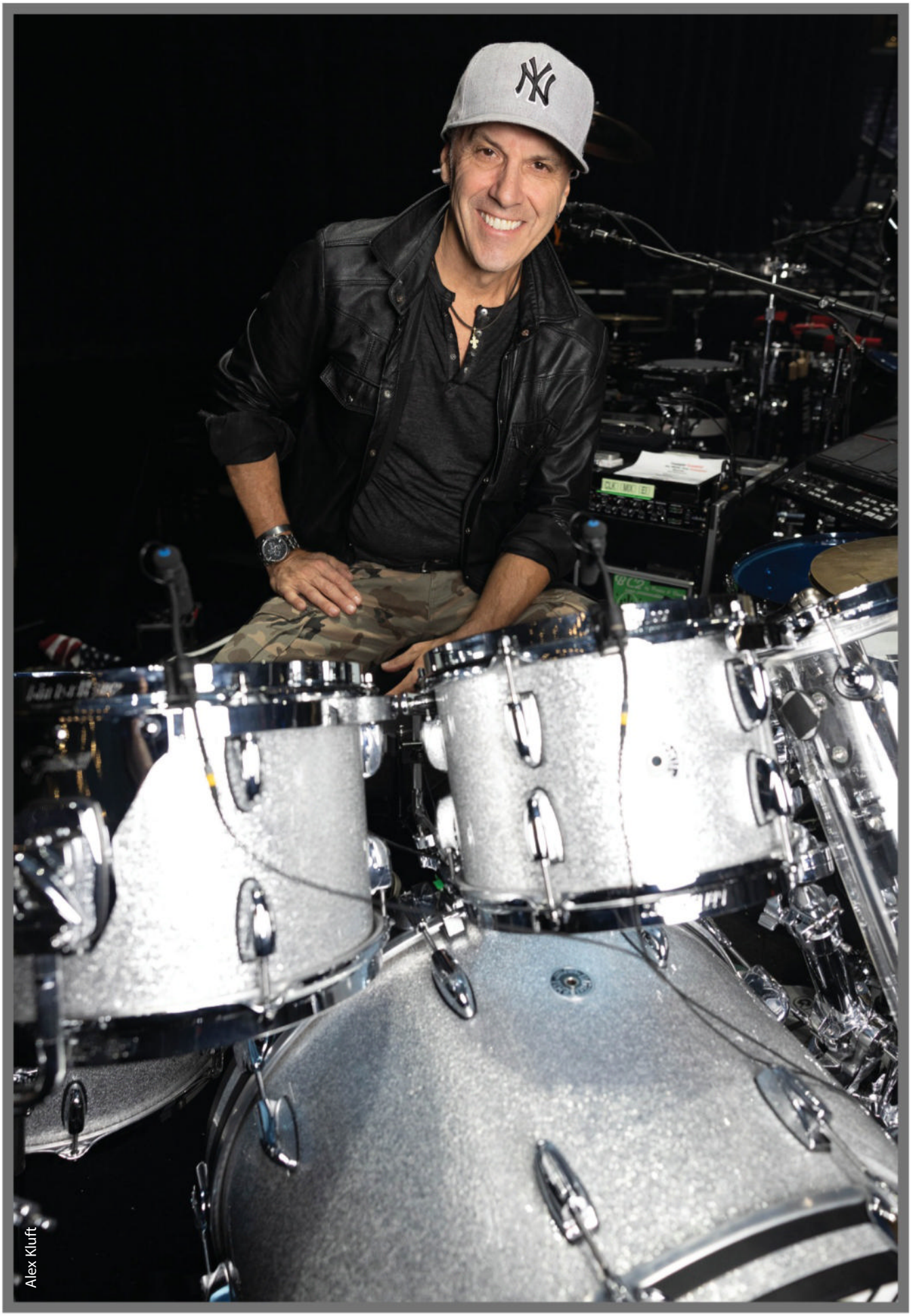
RR: When we did the *Tiny Desk Concert*, it was a great experience, but we had to do a lot of cutting. Nile and Russell got together and came up with the edits. Russell put together a tape and sent it out to make sure that everybody knew the cuts. Then our PR person Fran DeFeo had an idea to throw in the song "Soul Glo" that Nile wrote for the soundtrack of *Coming to America*. At first, the band thought that I could sing it, but it is way out of my range. But (keyboardist) Russell Graham stepped up, sang it, and just killed it! That video has gone viral, and Russell is an internet star, and we couldn't be happier. Chic is a very special organization of people. Nile and the rest of the band are open to all suggestions, and that openness and trust is what makes the groove and the music so strong. And the love and camaraderie in the Chic family that goes from the attorneys to the PR people, to the tour bus drivers, the crew, and everyone else... Is what makes this gig, this band, and this music, so special.

MD: What do you talk about in the Master Classes that you are doing?

RR: I start by explaining that we (musicians) are not in the music business, we're in the business music. I talk about business a lot because for many years I was the second call drummer, and I never cared. I didn't care about being the second call, I cared about getting the gig. I cared about leaving my mark on that gig so I would get called again. The playing part must be there, whatever level you're on, but if your business is not in place, the playing doesn't matter. If you're not gonna be prepared when you get there, and if you don't have your business taken care of, playing doesn't matter. Look at all of the guys that we have discussed here, Omar, Buddy, Harvey, Steve Gadd, all of them can play. But additionally, one of their defining traits is how responsible they are in their business. It's the same thing in Chic. I've watched Nile Rodgers walk on stage literally exhausted, but the only people that knew it was the other people in the band, because Nile had a job to do, and he's taking care of, and handling his business correctly, all of the time. That's an important part of what we do as musicians. Handling your business and understanding that that is just as important as your performance. It's important that musicians get a realistic view of what they're doing. Not only in how it relates to being artists themselves, but how it relates to them as people. I'm truthful when I teach, I'm not trying to come across as this "famous individual." That's not me and it's not helpful to present yourself in that way. Mental health is just as important and physical health, and they are both just as important to become a success in any field, including being a musician. For more information on Ralph, check out **drummingin21days.com**

Check out Ralph's drummer profile page, at moderndrummer.com

Anne Mc Coy



Alex Kluft

Enrique Iglesias and The Steve Morse Band's Van Romaine

By Jason Mehler

A synthesizer chord hits, as the stage lights blast through the smoke-filled arena. Recognizing the tune, the sold-out crowd leaps to their feet, just in time for the drum groove to kick in. It's a powerful four-on-the-floor groove with sloshy hi-hats and a slamming backbeat. Delivering that impeccable groove on his custom Gretsch Brooklyn drum kit for the song "Baby I Like It" is none other than drummer and band leader for Enrique Iglesias, Van Romaine.

As a guest of Van's on the *Trilogy Tour*, I had the honor of witnessing the entire show from stage right, and even climbing up behind Van on the drum riser to capture exclusive video for his *Modern Drummer* Tour Kit Rundown. In the three days I spent with the tour, I was truly impressed, not only by Van's infectious drumming, but by his professionalism, assertiveness, and respect for the artist and the gig. He is the definition of a seasoned professional, and in this interview, Van and I discuss some of the moments that helped to shape his career and continue to influence his path. We cover milestones, injuries, standout performances and working with various artists over the years. We also tap into his upcoming tour dates with Enrique Iglesias and The Steve Morse Band. Enjoy the ride!

MD: I hear your parents were a huge musical influence on you. Tell me about the early days.

VR: My parents were not musicians professionally, but they were both incredibly musical. My mother loved a lot of music that stemmed from black American blues, like Ray Charles, Stevie Wonder and Billie Holiday, but she also really loved the Beatles. I remember her waiting for the *Rubber Soul* album to be released, she came home with that record, and I thought, hey, I've got a cool mom! My father, on the other side of the musical spectrum, was a huge jazz fan. He loved big band jazz. He would take me to concerts. I've seen so many big bands, from Stan Kenton to Buddy Rich (many times), Woody Herman and Maynard Ferguson. A bunch of individual jazz artists as well like Sarah Vaughan and Betty Carter. But really, I loved that music as much as I loved rock n roll, like Zeppelin, James Brown so… some people say I was very confused [laughs].

MD: Was there a key turning point in your musical taste?

VR: A big transition for me, I think I was eleven years old, and I met this kid in middle school that played piano. My father drove me and my drum kit over to his house and we jammed a little bit and it felt effortless. Then he took me to his brother's stereo and played Miles Davis *Kind of Blue* and Jimi Hendrix *Band of Gypsy's*. I didn't know any Hendrix music before that day. Both albums completely resonated with me. I sort of veered away from the Buddy Rich thing and my listening and studying of music followed Miles Davis and things that manifested through Miles' musicians, but I was still very much into rock 'n roll like Zeppelin, Black Sabbath, The Police, and many others.

I didn't want to give other musicians the impression that I was strictly a jazz guy that wasn't willing to play rock or funk.

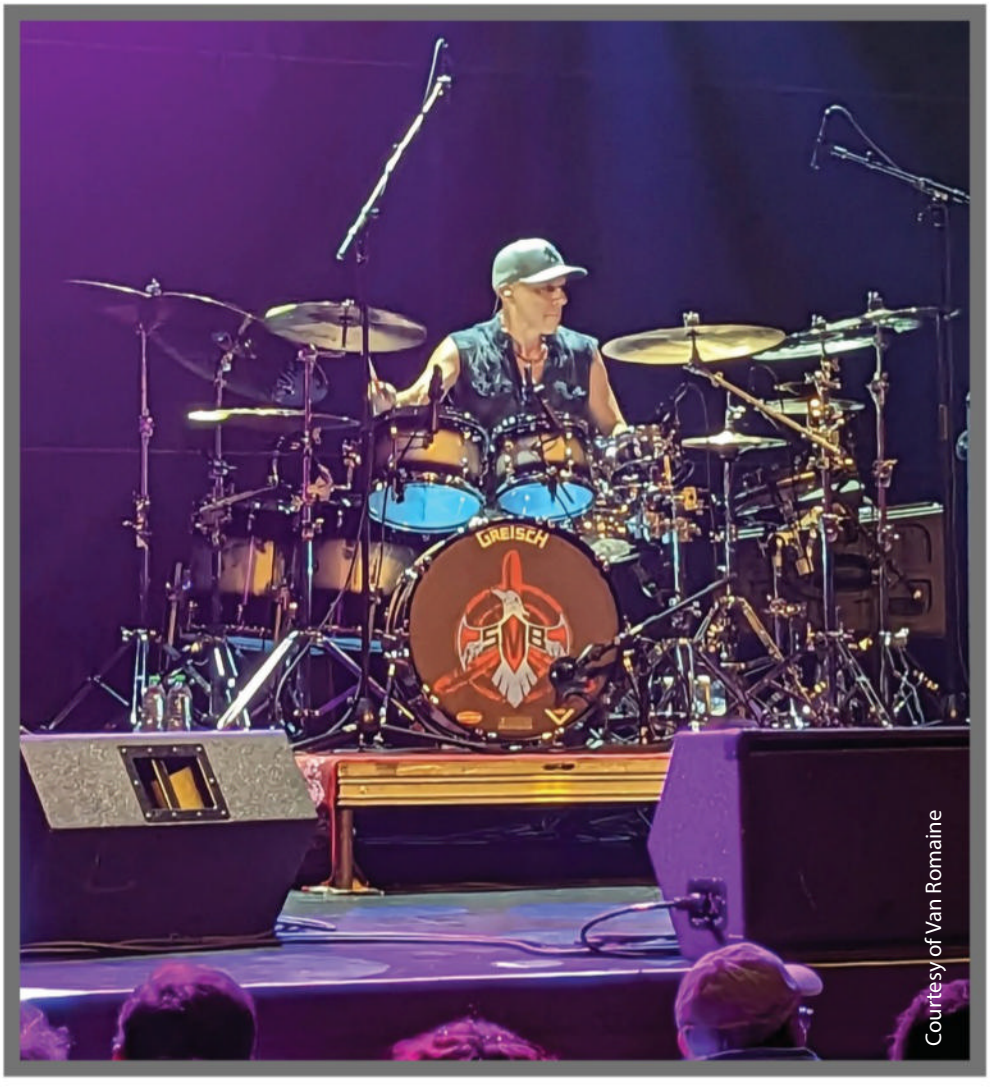
I was very passionate about both of those things. Not to jump around too much, but when I moved back to New York from University of Miami, I decided not to go after the jazz thing because I didn't want to lose the rock, pop thing that I was equally passionate about. At the time, it seemed like a lot of jazz musicians In New York were very outspoken and avoided anything electric like guitar etc. but I thought, well, [laughs] to me it's all music, so... I thought of it like marketing, you know? I didn't want to give other musicians the impression that I was strictly a jazz guy that wasn't willing to play rock or funk. Anyway, that sort of steered my career at that point.

MD: As far as a career, was there a point that you recall thinking, "This is what I will be doing. This is my career and how I will generate revenue."

VR: Yeah, I was thirteen, living in New Jersey, fifteen miles west of Manhattan. I started getting gigs with older musicians at parties and weddings. I thought to myself that maybe I've got some natural talent that the older guys see in me. Aside from that, I wasn't great at anything else, aside from maybe some sports. It didn't seem like a realistic goal, to be a professional skier or something like that.

MD: So, wow! You were a paid musician at thirteen?

VR: Well, I wasn't making "a living," but you know, some twenty-year-olds were paying



Courtesy of Van Romaine

me a couple hundred bucks to play a bar mitzvah. Before that point, it was just for fun. Same as playing baseball or frisbee.

MD: You say you weren't great at anything else, but in the short time I've known you, it's obvious to me that you are multi-talented. Being a musical director, diving into new technologies and electronics where others may shy away. It seems everything you focus on; you master quickly.

VR: Well, I think it's important and it really comes down to doing what you love, and not because you feel you "have to" because another musician is doing it. Learning about electronics and triggering initially came from me wanting to produce those sounds. I thought it was cool and I couldn't do it with just a drum set. It wasn't a strategic move to get more gigs or anything. However, it definitely helped.

sounds amazing," because it added more dimensions to the music. It was just another outlet of creativity.

So, I went out and bought the original LinnDrum. It wasn't even MIDI'd, I had to have it customized. I found someone in NY to add MIDI functionality to it. You had to open it up to change the chips if you wanted a different snare drum. What we all hear on Don Henley's "Boys of Summer", Prince's *Purple Rain*, Sade's big hits, they are all the same LinnDrum snare sample, but they are tuned differently.

MD: What was next after the LinnDrum for you?

VR: After that, I bought a Simmons brain and pads because I wanted to add those sounds to my live kit. Those got stolen, and from the insurance money, I bought a few Akai S900 samplers. That's where it really took off for me because you could record

Courtesy of Van Romaine

MD: Do you remember your first experience with electronic drums?

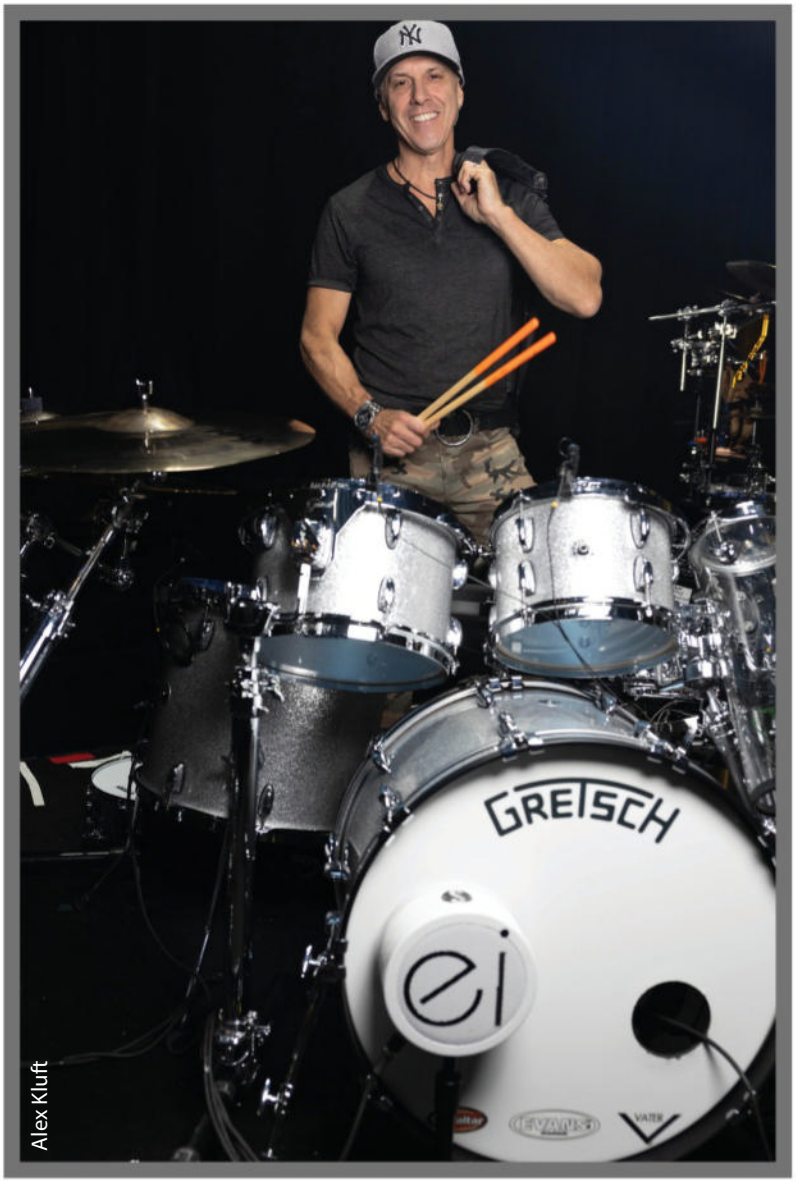
VR: I totally remember, vividly! Basically, I was starting to hear records like Prince's *Purple Rain*, and I was thinking, ok, to me it sounds like (maybe) live cymbals. I didn't think the kick and snare sounded like a real drum set. I wondered what's going on here? I remember drummers at the time saying, "This is bad, we're gonna lose our gigs to these electronic drums. I could understand that thinking of course, but I thought, "I think that

your own samples and use other people's sound libraries. It was still archaic, but it worked. Through that, because I was drumming and using samplers, I got asked to do some rap records. One of those was Naughty By Nature's "O.P.P."

MD: Tell me more about the Naughty By Nature thing.

VR: Yeah, I was already into some rap stuff at the time. It was still fairly new as a genre. My great friend Dave Bellochio in Northern NJ had a basement studio, and we would work on projects together. One day he called and said there were some

rappers on a new label called Tommy Boy and they wanted to come in and get some groove samples. They were looking to recreate grooves from famous records that they could use without paying royalties. We recorded a bunch of samples, and at one point they even had MC's come in and beatbox rhythms into a mic for me to mimic on the drums. Anyway, for O.P.P. they wanted the groove from the Jackson Five's "ABC." I played it and was credited on the record, but they may have obtained the rights to the original song. I'm not sure how much of my sample was used, but the single blew up and I received my first platinum from that.



Alex Kluft

Learning about electronics and triggering initially came from me wanting to produce those sounds. I thought it was cool and I couldn't do it with just a drum set. It wasn't a strategic move to get more gigs or anything.

MD: Let's do a quick lightning round and get your thoughts on a few of the artists and projects you've worked with over the years. Before we talk about Enrique and The Steve Morse Band, I'd like to touch on other projects. How about Blood Sweat and Tears?

VR: Yeah, Blood Sweat and Tears was my first touring gig. I auditioned for that in Manhattan and got the gig. That was an unbelievable band and David Clayton-Thomas was an incredible singer. It was the first time in my career that I heard thousands of people cheering as we walked out on stage to the band announcement. It was just an incredible experience and I felt like I was a good fit for that because it was like a fusion of jazz, rock, funk, and R&B. I have amazing memories from that. It was also my first chance to travel and see the world. I played with an incredible horn section too.

MD: Joan Osbourne?

VR: I used to play with Joan during the periods between The Steve Morse Band shows when I was back home. She wasn't signed at the time, so this is before her big break out record. We would gig all over the place and she would sell out pretty large venues as an un-signed artist, that was pretty unheard of. She always had an incredible band. It was a levitating musical experience playing blues clubs in the city. I'm happy to see that she is still out there doing it.

MD: You played with Kansas?

VR: I was called by the drummer of Kansas Phil Ehart after The Steve Morse Band had opened for a few shows. It was my understanding that Phil preferred to manage the band from home, and he was looking for a drummer that was the right fit for those guys. That was another challenge. Like other bands I've been the second drummer for (Steve Morse, Spin Doctors, etc.) Kansas had a drummer that had a unique signature style. They're all one-of-a-kind drummers, so it was always a challenge to come in and try to make everyone comfortable and provide a smooth transition. I toured with Kansas for a year, and it was an amazing experience. They played every show like it was the last day on earth, and they still do. I saw them recently.

MD: Let's talk about your transition to becoming a musical director. How did that come about and when did you feel comfortable taking on that role?

VR: I wasn't comfortable with it at first. I was freaking out [laughing]. I was touring with Bernie Worrell, keyboardist & founding member of Parliament-Funkadelic who has worked with many bands such as the Talking Heads. I was a huge fan and couldn't believe I even got the gig playing

drums for him. Anyway, we had been playing for a while and he asked me, in his own terminology, "I want you to be my Lieutenant." I said, "Do you mean musical director?" He said, "Yeah, *whatever*. You know, bring people in. Help me arrange this stuff." He's the one who actually encouraged me to start songwriting with him, but being MD was the first thing. We were playing 400 to 1,000 seat venues at that point.

MD: So that was your first time as musical director. What then?

VR: After that, I toured with German singer, Nena ("99 Luftballoons.") At the end of my first tour with her, she asked me to be musical director for the upcoming year. That was a tall order because I had never hired a whole band before. And I was an American drummer who didn't speak German, and I was going to be her musical director. I was negotiating, finding people at the right price point, and bringing them over from Germany to the U.S.. I wasn't sure I could pull it off, but I realized that with all her knowledge and experience, Nena knew I had it in me and that I was the right fit. Sure, I made mistakes, but I learned from them, and it worked out for the better.

MD: The Nena gig was a wild ride for you. What was it like being part of her resurgence?

VR: My time with Nena was a very different experience for me on many levels. She had come back into the music business after taking time off to have four kids, after my first tour with her she asked me to be her musical director— hiring all her band members, arranging the set lists, and re-arranging the songs for the live shows. As the music evolved, I ended up triggering some sound design, loops, samples, and vocal effects in Ableton from the drum kit when that was a relatively new thing. What I didn't realize was that within a few years I was going to be involved with recording several #1 singles (the first since "99 Luftballons,") multiple platinum albums, and seeing her win album, song, and artist of the year at the Echo Awards (Germany's Grammy's.)

That was followed by sold out arena tours with an orchestra featuring many of Germany's biggest artists as guest singers (Udo Lindenburg, Peter Maffay, Xavier Naidoo etc.) Just imagine running the show with all of this huge legendary talent and not speaking German very well. Of course, I had the help of Nena and our German keyboarder Derek Von Krogh who has since taken over as her MD and producer, but it was a whole lot of first experiences for me and everyone involved. More than anything, it was amazing to see and be part of the whole process of seeing the struggles that Nena had just getting back into the music world and rising to the top of the game again and staying there.

MD: And now you're the musical director for Enrique.

VR: Enrique needed to make a change with his musical director, who was also MD for some other huge artists like Rhianna and he needed someone new. Now we're talking about a global superstar, asking me to be a musical director. I was nervous, but I instantly said yes. Again, I knew that these artists are smart enough and they wouldn't ask me to be MD if they didn't think I could do it— even if it involved a lot of growing and learning.

Courtesy of Van Romaine

With Enrique, I do have a lot of other help. Like with this U.S. tour, Carlos Paucar, who produced some of Enrique's latest hits, is on the road with us. When he is on tour with us, he is the MD as far as the music is concerned, and I become the band leader. I hire the musicians and help creatively. Even then, I try to hire people that come with great ideas. When Carlos is not involved, I take on more of the MD work, but ideas come from everyone in the band and of course from Enrique. Overall, with Bernie Worrell, Nena, and Enrique, they wanted to hire someone in the band to be band leader/musical director instead of hiring someone from outside the camp. So, I seemed like the best

option within these bands at the time.

MD: Because you already understood what was involved?

VR: Yeah, they didn't want to change the dynamic of the band and hire some hotshot from New York or L.A. The bands had a pretty even keel, and the goal was to keep it that way. That's another thing. Understanding the stress that these artists must be under, having their names on the marquee; It's my job to be a buffer. If they're freaking out, I'm there to say, "I'm listening to you, and we're gonna get through this."

MD: I witnessed your professionalism in the three days I spent with the Trilogy Tour. You were very calm and yet very cognizant of the lanes and lines not to be crossed, so to speak.

VR: Well, the Miami shows were a stress-fest because a lot of the musicians had family from the area in attendance. Also, CNN was filming the show for their New Year's special, so the pressure was elevated.

MD: Yeah, I did see a CNN anchor roaming around. Regardless, it was a very comfortable environment.

VR: I'm never going to lose sight of why we are really there. In the end, it's a show. I'm so grateful for you and *Modern Drummer* to come and cover that. I'm incredibly inspired to be in *Modern Drummer*. And the reason they trust me to have you bring cameras on stage, and the reason they hired me, is because they know that I would never compromise the most important thing. If someone is more inspired to be in a magazine than they are for the show, there's a problem. The show is the most important thing, always, always, always… always!

MD: How do you prepare before going on stage?

VR: I think it's really important, no matter what's going on that day, to do whatever it takes to be at level ten for the performance. You may have jet lag, you may be hungry, you may be dealing with stress or drama. If you thrive on those situations, great, but the key is to facilitate whatever is needed to get you to your peak performance. So if I need to nap, eat, listen to music, warm-up, exercise, whatever it takes to get there— I just plan to be at level ten when the lights come up. With the Enrique Band, we have a lot of love and connection between us. 45 minutes before the show the music pops on in the dressing room and we get in the mood just being together. You can't put a price tag on that.

MD: Earlier you mentioned making mistakes. Do you have any advice regarding specific mistakes that you've made in your career along the way that might help guide younger drummers and musicians?

VR: I can reflect on some things in my younger years that took some time for me to mature out of. And I'm still working on myself, but without getting into too much detail, I recall some things early on that could've been handled differently. Things I wish I could Ctrl+Z or Command+Z (undo) my way out of.

What helped me get through that was asking myself empowering questions about a certain scenario. For example, I could ask myself a negative question like, "How come I'm not working enough?" Your brain is gonna come up with an answer to that, and it's not going to be an empowering answer. But, along the same lines, I could ask myself, "How can I work with a lot more inspiring artists and have fun while doing it?" It forces you to come up with better answers and see things from a different perspective. That's some Tony Robins kind of stuff [laughs.]

MD: Your approach shines through in how you work with fellow musicians. For example, our recent discussion about seeking a stand-in drummer for shows you'll miss. Where a less experienced drummer might choose a "just good enough" replacement to avoid being outshone, you prioritize the artist and fellow band members' needs, mirroring your music director (MD) choices.

VR: Yeah, I can't do that to the people I love. I subbed out Nena's gig a ton because I had to, and she understood. But some of those drummers are world class players. Sterling Campbell from Bowie's band, Zach Alford, Nir Z is one of the top country drummers right now, Frank Ferrer, who plays with Guns 'N Roses, and there are others I'm leaving out, but those are the main guys. Aside from finding a great drummer, I am looking for someone who matches the social dynamic of the band. It really is an ecosystem, and that's a huge part of the decision-making when I'm hiring someone or subbing.

> I knew that these artists are smart enough and they wouldn't ask me to be MD if they didn't think I could do it— even if it involved a lot of growing and learning.

MD: You recently subbed out the Enrique gig for a few weeks while recovering from surgery for a shoulder injury. Tell us about that.

VR: Yes, my supraspinatus tendon became 100% detached from my shoulder and I had surgery in mid-December to have it reattached. I was told that if I didn't act now, the tendon would harden and not be pliable enough to stretch and attach it. It was now or never. Anyway, the surgery was a success and I'm back on track and feeling pretty good. I'm super grateful to Enrique and his whole team for being so understanding about it. I've never had to miss shows in the past.

MD: Did you have to alter your setup to prevent any further injury?

VR: I had already modified my setup prior to surgery because the injury was causing pain with certain movements. I dropped the right side of the kit a little lower and I moved the floor tom to my left side. I am a lefty, but I play on a righty kit so it is relatively easy for me to play some things with a left-hand lead and figure out what works and adapt the kit as necessary. It's also amazing to have companies like Gibraltar, Gretsch, Evans and Vater, ready to send gear and help, if I need to alter things.

MD: That's great. I love how you've incorporated the Gibraltar rack with your drum kit. It's very unique. The curved horizontal sections are actually on the floor and the stands are at an angle, holding the toms and cymbals. Also, some of the tom stands are behind the drum instead of in front, which allows the audience to see the drum without obstruction.

VR: This set up took my tech Brett Grau and I a while to maneuver, but I've always loved how easy and useful the Gibraltar Racks are to customize, in addition to all of the options the various parts create.

MD: Seems like most drummers I know have a MacGyver-like inventiveness to them. Getting back to your career; You've been in the drumming community for many years. You've obviously had the chance to meet your heroes. Tell me about that.
VR: I've met some of them, yeah. And played with some of them too. I guess the most extreme example of that is my relationship with the Steve Morse Band. For the last 20-something years, Steve has been playing with Deep Purple. They were redoing a concerto that was written by Jon Lord for the London Symphony Orchestra and first performed in 1969 at the Royal Albert Hall in London. Because Steve Morse was part of Deep Purple, they wanted the Steve Morse Band to play three songs in the middle of the show with the orchestra. They wrote amazing arrangements of these Steve Morse songs that we had been playing as a trio. I have always been an Ian Paice fan. We spent this time rehearsing. And right before we went on to play these three songs to a sold-out crowd, Ian came to me and said, "Why don't you leave your kit on stage and come up to do "Smoke on the Water" with me for the encore?" So, I went on and played the encore with Ronnie James Dio on vocals and a cast of others. I came off stage and went to the dressing room, still blown away by the whole experience. Then Steve comes up to me and says, "Can I introduce you to some friends?" I said of course, and I turned around and there was Jimmy Page and George Harrison! I thought, "Do you guys do this tag team thing to blow people's minds? Cause just one of you guys is too much to handle!" It was a pretty amazing experience.
MD: Unreal. People say, don't ever meet your heroes.
VR: Fortunately for me, most of my experiences have been great!!
MD: Regarding memorable performances; Out of all the recordings that you've done over the years, is there any one specific that you are most proud of? Or better yet, if you were introducing Van Romaine's drumming to someone, is there any recording that you would point to and say, "Did you hear what I did there?"
VR: I would say any of the Steve Morse Band records. I'm very proud of what we've done and how its evolved. Steve informed me a couple records in, that he was writing for Dave LaRue and my strengths, as he did on his earlier records with the Dregs and the earlier line up of The Steve Morse band with Rod Morgenstein and Jerry Peek. I feel, in that regard, the music

Courtesy of Van Romaine

was crafted to the way I hear things naturally, including using some electronics elements. It's all live drums, but there are some electronic elements and some samples.

Anyway, I started with Steve in '89 and he's been a huge, positive influence on my life. To still be doing that today is a blessing. The fact that Dave LaRue, Steve Morse, and Van Romaine still have fun playing music together, and we're working on a new record that sounds amazing. I'm just grateful for the opportunity to have these long, fruitful relationships that keep growing.

MD: You have some upcoming dates with Steve Morse and the Dixie Dregs.

VR: Yes! We'll be doing some dates in April and May with the Dixie Dregs and Rod Morgenstein, so we'll have some double drumming going on. He's left-handed, so our hi-hats are talking to each other. We've done a few of these tours, but it's been a while. Rod has become a really good friend over the years. The Steve Morse Band opens up for the Dregs and I play part of the set with the Dregs and we do a double drum solo thing. In my opinion, our playing is really different from each other in a complimentary way.

MD: Did you and Rod script out the drum solo?

VR: Yeah, and we'll have to do it again for this time out. Rod lives on Long Island, so we'll exchange ideas via email and then work out the parts at his place.

> Overall, with Bernie Worrell, Nena, and Enrique, they wanted to hire someone in the band to be band leader/musical director instead of hiring someone from outside the camp.

MD: How different is your drum setup with Steve Morse compared to Enrique Iglesias?

VR: It's really not that different. With the Steve Morse Band I use an LP trash snare as my second snare and have an LP Micro snare mounted up by the rack toms. With the Steve Morse Band I use the Roland SPD-SX to run some subliminal sound design tracks in addition to running a click for several of the songs. The click runs out of two exclusive outputs into my mixer and the samples goes out to the front-of-house and monitors. The click is mainly because Steve is playing some difficult runs so we found for the first time that having a specific tempo in some of the songs has helped. With Enrique, it's mostly just one-shot samples like cajon and percussion samples as well as 808 subs and some reverse snare samples but there are no click or tracks coming out of the SPD-SX.

Courtesy of Van Romaine

MD: Tell me more about the custom drum kit you are using. Gretsch Brooklyn's right?

VR: Yes. The kick drum is14x22. I'm a huge believer in the 14 as opposed to the 16 or 18" depths but of course this is a matter of opinion. I think you can get a great sound out of either, but owning a studio, and recording in a lot of different studios, the microphones seem to like the fourteen-inch depth the most. The tom sizes are: 7x8, 7x10, 8x12, 12x14, and 14x16. Sometimes I convert the 7x8 into a stereo trigger by putting a Roland or Evans mesh head on it, stuffing it with foam then mounting a stereo Roland trigger. So, the head would be one sound, and the rim would be another. Anyway, it's great to have these tools. You get into a musical situation and see what works, see what doesn't. Like the kit you mentioned earlier, the one I'm currently using with the Steve Morse Band has curved bars coming out from under the kit on each side and the tom mounts are on my side of the kit, allowing the Gretsch Broadcaster drums to be fully visible.

Courtesy of Van Romaine

MD: Yes, it's a very clean look.

VR: Well, thank you. I don't like it when the rack is covering the kit, especially when you have these beautiful drums. So, I've found a great solution, with the help of the people at Gibraltar and my drum tech, Brett Grau, who has been with me for 22 years now.

MD: Let's shift gears a bit. As you know, *Modern Drummer* has been around since 1977. With a readership ranging from young drummers to seasoned veterans, what advice can you offer both groups on maintaining health and managing the physical and mental challenges as we get older?

VR: I'm hugely passionate, not just for the health of my body, but for my mental health. Exercising is a key element to my happiness. Because I'm getting older, there are certain things that my body doesn't want to do anymore. So, the exercise thing has changed over time. At this point, I'm not interested in heading to the gym for bench presses. I do some cardio at the house. I've got an elliptical stationary bike here. I also run a lot. It could be as simple as 20 minutes of cardio. Maybe some lightweight training.

The latest thing for me at the age of 60 is that I've introduced Yoga into my world. It's very mellow though, like 20 minutes, three times a week. I'm not attending a class, just doing it on YouTube. It's non-intimidating, beginner stuff but it makes a huge difference in my flexibility, and it REALLY affects my drumming. Moving the body is so important. It takes discipline though. I understand that people wake up and they have responsibilities, but we need to prioritize exercise. I've found that, on the days that I exercise in the morning, I'm closer to a level ten for the rest of the day. The key is to be consistent with it.

> The Steve Morse Band opens up for the Dregs and I play part of the set with the Dregs and we do a double drum solo thing.

MD: For the younger drummers, do you have any advice for somebody just starting out or looking to make this their career?

VR: My advice has changed over the years. I used to say, "You gotta move to a city where it's all happening," but that's not really the case anymore from what I'm seeing. With the power of social media and the internet, some people are getting hired through platforms such as Instagram or TikTok. Many don't play with other artists, but they end up having great careers as

clinicians. It's easy to focus on negative things like clubs closing and less budgets for recording, but opportunities are out there in different ways. I think it's important to have a good social media presence, after all, as a band leader/musical director, when I'm looking to hire people, that's the first place I go. I'll call other MDs and say, "I am looking specifically for this. Can you send me some names?" Then I'll check their socials first, so I'm not wasting anyone's time. If they pass that phase, I'll do a little more research and then give them a call. That's what gets the ball rolling. It's a much better use of time and money.

MD: That makes a lot of sense.

VR: Another piece of advice for anyone is to just go with what you're inspired by. I think it's a great idea to delve into electronics and digital audio if you're into that, but I feel there are many ways to contribute musically without it. I feel that the musicians that are passionate and focused on their own strengths, even if it's radically different from someone else, are the ones that truly stand out and become irreplaceable.

Another piece of advice for anyone is to just go with what you're inspired by. I think it's a great idea to delve into electronics and digital audio if you're into that.

MD: So, it's ok to *NOT* be a carbon copy of Steve Gadd, John Bonham, or the latest social media drumming sensation. Just be yourself.

VR: Exactly!

MD: Stay out of your own way. Great advice!

VR: Having said that, I do think it's good to over-prepare for things like auditions and performances, especially if it is outside of your wheelhouse. For me, I want the whole thing to win for everybody, so I'd rather be more than ready, rather than have a half-baked performance.

For drummers looking to secure a gig with a touring band nowadays, it's more important than ever to learn to play to a click track. Many acts, even though they may not use backing tracks, use synchronized video and lighting elements with their music that require alignment with a click track. In my world, having that skill has been a huge bonus.

MD: In your experience as a touring drummer, can you share some other advice for those who have never done it? Something that you may not think about until you are in the thick of it?

I do think it's good to over-prepare for things like auditions and performances, especially if it is outside of your wheelhouse.

VR: One thing that you may not think about beforehand is the effects of travel on your body and mind, especially when flying through different time zones. Sometimes you travel sixteen hours to play an hour or so of music. You might be in a position where you have the craziest jet lag of your life and still must pull off a stellar performance. Having a lack luster show is not an option, so regardless of the time and energy spent getting to the gig, you must learn how to quickly turn things around, so you feel great before hitting the stage. For me, cardio right before the show does the job.

You must learn to carve out time for things and be as prepared as possible. Another example is when you are traveling and not using your own gear for some shows. Even though you may have a drum tech taking care of things, it's good to show up early and make sure everything is gonna work or at least know what you are stuck with and adjust the best you can. Lastly, as far as advice for newcomers to the touring scene, just try to be a chill person to spend time with.

MD: When you were touring the world, were there any country-specific encounters that were unexpected or even scary?

VR: Well, we usually have meetings to discuss safety and other factors when heading into other countries. In Tel Aviv for example, we had to go through scenarios and learn different color codes in case of bomb threats. In Israel, they don't always stamp your passport, you give them a piece of paper to stamp. They assume you will be traveling to other middle eastern countries and that it may cause problems with entry. In Saudi Arabia, we had to change some of the lyrics and the female dancers had to wear different clothes. Western, full production shows are kind of a new thing in Saudi Arabia. That's something that is unique to Enrique, and I love that about him, he's been very passionate about playing in places that others haven't played before. We played Damascus, Syria and we showed up to sound check at the same time as the people that were building the stage from the ground up, and we were like, what? They hadn't had a concert there in 30 years! In Beirut, they wanted to show the world that they were ready to have Americans and foreigners play concerts there. We had to bring our suitcases to the stage so we could make a quick exit to a chartered plane. Unfortunately, the customs guy kept all our passports and wouldn't let us leave, because he wanted payola from the promoter. So, we were without our passports in a country that didn't really care for Americans. Not fun, but it worked out and Enrique felt it was worth it to bring the music and performance to these people that had never seen anything like it.

MD: When you're not on tour, you do a lot of stuff in your home studio. Tell me about that.

VR: Initially, when I started doing sessions in NY, that was like seventy-five percent of my income. I wasn't paying attention to microphones or gear. As time went on, I began to grow more interested in studio gear. At one point I received some publishing money from a song I co-wrote that did pretty well, so I built my first studio with a partner in New York City. We did a lot of TV commercials and records. And very often putting drums on records.

I'd hire all my favorite engineers to come in and while they

were working, I would ask them for gear recommendations, and I would take notes on what they were doing. Sometimes when I'm recording a band and there's a budget, I'll bring in a great engineer so I can take meticulous notes and make videos to learn from.

So, now my studio is at my house and it's basically soundproof. Most of the tracking stuff is here in my converted garage and the ceiling is pretty high, maybe twelve feet. I have amps upstairs as well and cables are snaked down through the wall into my mic preamps. So, if I'm cutting with a band, the sound of the amps won't bleed through. Yeah, it's been a long learning curve, but luckily some great engineers have helped me to really dial it in. A big part of having a great sounding recording aside from knowing how to play, is what mics to use, the mic preamps and placement (phasing issues), and the sound of the room. I've learned a lot from some talented engineers.

MD: What are you using to track drums?

VR: I tend to use two systems in my studio. I have an old HD Pro Tools system, which I'm sort of stuck on version ten now, but it works perfectly, with zero latency. I really don't want to change anything with that. So, I use that as a tape machine, so-to-speak, when I'm multi-tracking. For the other production stuff, my laptop is loaded with Ableton and every powerful plugin that I can get my hands on. I have the two systems networked so I can work on both systems at the same time if needed. I was forced to learn Ableton for the touring work I was doing, so it's become second nature.

> Sometimes you travel sixteen hours to play an hour or so of music. You might be in a position where you have the craziest jet lag of your life and still must pull off a stellar performance.

MD: You are a very accomplished drummer. Do you ever think about your legacy and what you'd want to be remembered for?

VR: Interesting. I haven't really thought about it yet. I kinda just go day to day and do my best. I guess if I had to choose, I'd want to be known as someone who gave everything to the people he cared about and loved. At the top of that list are my kids and my wife. That also includes my extended family and the artists that I've worked with, because we've created families within the music and the work.

MD: Is there anything you'd like to add in conclusion?

VR: I know the music business can be tough, as can any business, but I've learned that there is always a positive side to every situation. Don't waste time and energy on negative things that you can't control. Viewing situations from a positive perspective has helped me continue to learn and move forward.

Check out Van's drummer profile page, at moderndrummer.com

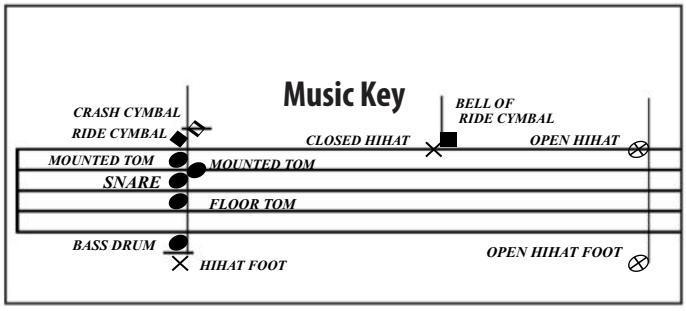
Courtesy of Van Romaine

"Two Bass Hit"

Transcription by Marc Atkinson

This month's transcription delves into the timeless classic "Two Bass Hit" from the brilliant Miles Davis album, *Milestones*. Tony Williams once called *Milestones*, "The perfect jazz record." With each instrument brimming with musicality, it's no surprise that icons like Miles, Coltrane, Bill Evans, Art Farmer, and Dexter Gordon, among others, loved Philly Joe Jones. A true master of his craft, Philly Joe's vibrant energy and musical prowess on the drums radiate throughout this piece, showcasing his undeniable greatness. Penned by Dizzy Gillespie, "Two Bass Hit" defies convention by having all instruments start with the melody on the "and" of one, brilliantly disguising where beat one is throughout the intro.

Philly Joe's intricate left-hand comping and innovative bass drum vocabulary set the jazz standard of the era. A quick note, stems with a line through them indicate hitting the right stick on the shaft of the left stick, with the tip touching the snare head (also known as "stick on stick.") Dive into this transcription, and if it appears daunting, simply groove along with the recording— Philly Joe's swing feel is nothing short of perfection.



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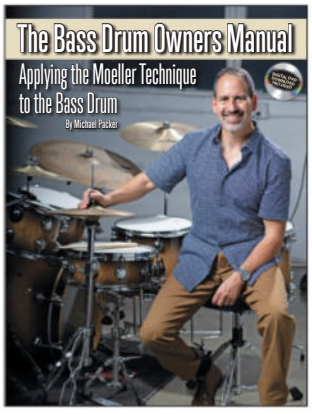
Marc Atkinson, a dedicated musician, honed his craft under the guidance of the renowned Gary Chaffee. Now calling Las Vegas home, Marc is on the brink of unveiling his labor of love—a comprehensive transcription book that promises to captivate music enthusiasts worldwide.

Check out Marc's *Modern Drummer* profile page at moderndrummer.com

The Bass Drum Owners Manual:

More Hand and Foot Combinations and Etude #3

By Michael Packer

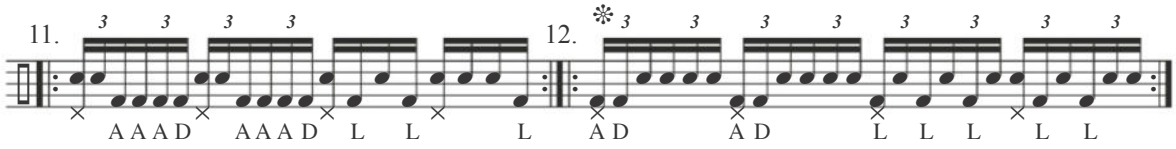


This month *Modern Drummer* will continue to include excerpts from Michael Packer's essential book on bass drum control and technique *The Bass Drum Owners Manual: Applying the Moeller Technique to the Bass Drum.* As you will see, this is a new way of thinking about bass drum (and foot) control that is based in an old, popular, and useful hand technique called The Moeller Technique. Michael addresses the essential components of bass drum and hi-hat control. Let Michael's wisdom and the wisdom of the Moeller Technique help you improve the control, sound, and eventually speed, of your feet, regardless of musical style.

Hand and Foot Combinations

The following exercises and Etude will aid in the development of your musical ideas and their execution. Many great drummers incorporate hand and foot combinations as a large portion of their vocabulary. Including the bass drum in fills and solos will balance the sound of the drum set. These exercises are first to be played as written with the hi-hat on the downbeats. This will help develop a strong sense of the pulse and is great as an independence builder. When you're comfortable with each exercise, orchestrate them freely around the drum set and drop out the high hat for a nice melodic approach. Since Etude #3 consists of different 16th and 16th note triplet ideas, we will start with some warm-ups that focus on 16th and 16th note triplet ideas.

Hand and Foot Combination Warm-Ups with 16th Notes and 16th Note Triplets Combined



Etude #3

Check out Michael's *Modern Drummer* profile page and get your copy of *The Bass Drum Owners Manual* at moderndrummer.com

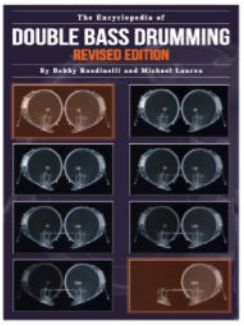
The Encyclopedia of Double Bass Drumming

16th Note Triplets

By Bobby Rondinelli

In the new and revised edition of the *Encyclopedia of Double Bass Drumming*, Bobby Rondinelli includes nine new double bass drumming chapters. The new and expanded edition covers contemporary techniques such as bass drum double strokes, feet-only exercises, binary and ternary rhythms, "skiplets", beat turnarounds, the "ladder", and playing doubles with the hands while playing singles with the feet. These concepts will challenge your playing while expanding your double bass vocabulary. If practiced with intention and diligence, this material will help to prepare you for the demands of today's music. This material is advanced, but completely attainable for anyone who has completed the previous chapters in the book.

This month, Bobby details how to work on 16th Note Triplets. These are a very cool sound, and create a nice contrast in sound from playing 16th note and 32nd note double bass ideas. They also provide a nice next gear (of speed) between 16th's and 32nd's.



- When playing alternating sixth note triplets right foot lead, it's important to realize that your back beat lands with your right foot. This is the opposite of eighth note triplets (right foot lead,) where your backbeat lands with your left foot.
- Don't flam the snare and bass drum.
- Stay relaxed as you increase the tempo.
- Be aware of your body posture.
- Don't fight gravity. Make it work for you.
- You can swing the non triplet 16th notes or play them straight.
- A few of the beats and fills that follow are not written in strong foot notation (consistently leading with the right foot.) While it's good to practice patterns with all footing combinations (as presented in the warm-ups,) the ones shown are the most practical or are a good starting point.

Warm-Ups

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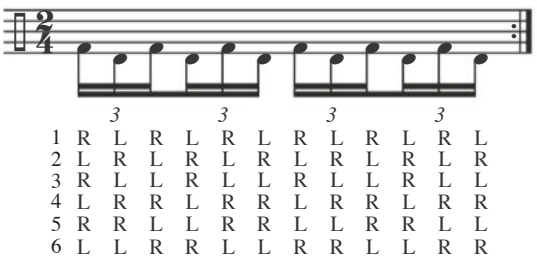

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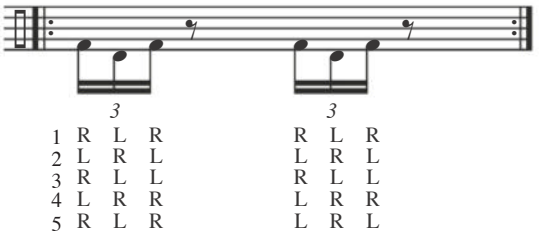

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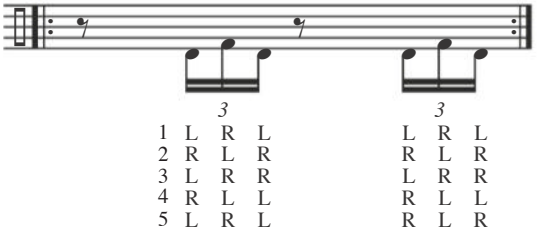

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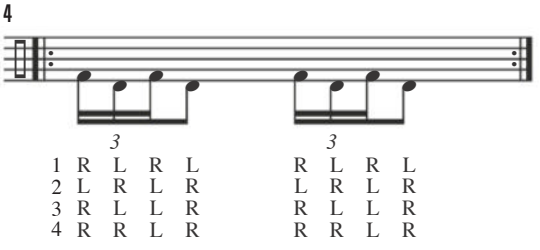

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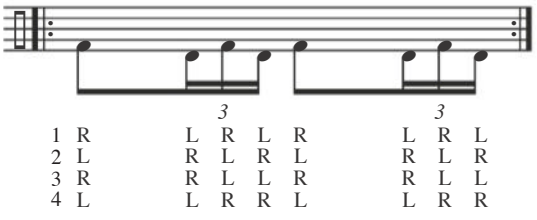

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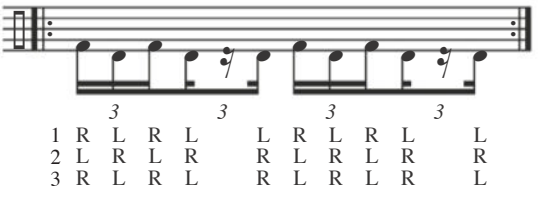

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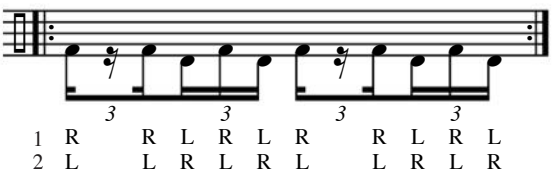

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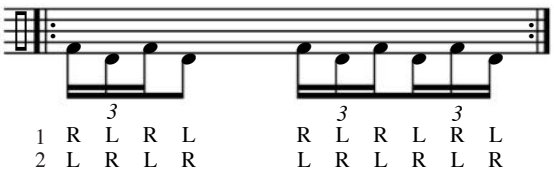

Beats

Other possible footings are written under beats and fills

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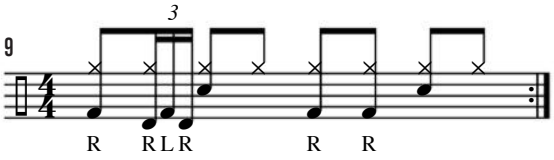

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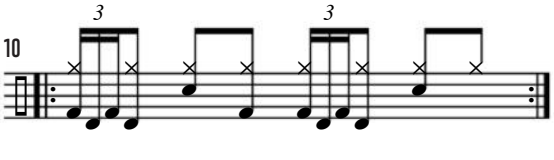

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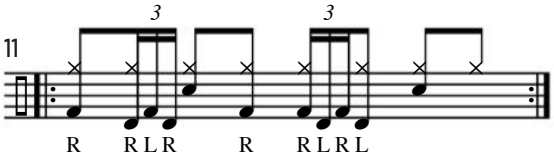

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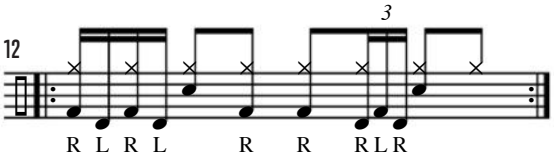

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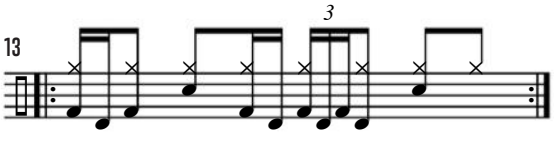

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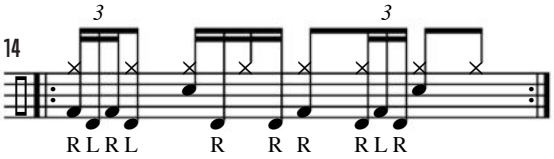

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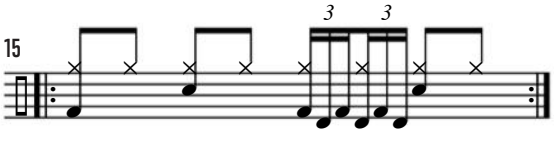

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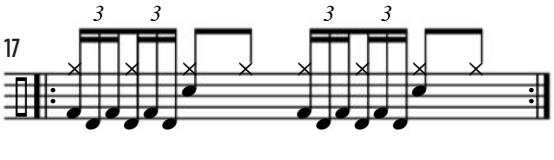

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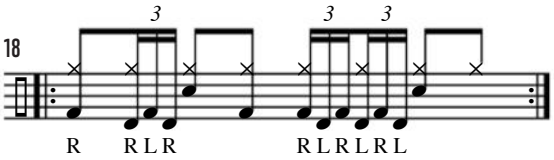

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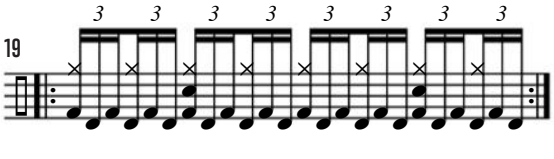

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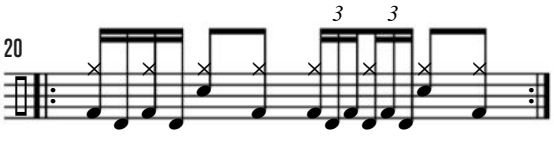

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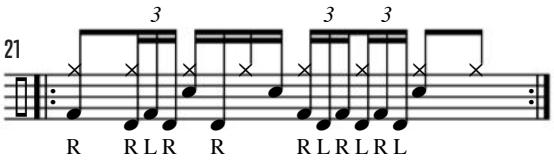

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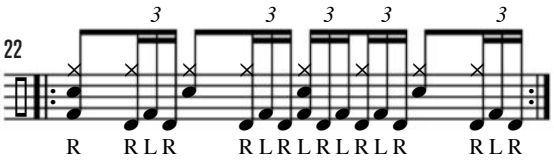

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Beats and Fills Combined

Check out Bobby's *Modern Drummer* profile pages and get your copy of *The Encyclopedia of Double Bass Drumming* at moderndrummer.com

The Shape of Drumming To Come

By Chris Lesso

Stagnation is the death of our evolution. Staying still is the opposite of flow. As we embrace change, we're reinvented along with the instrument itself. To stand still is to die. The drumkit has only been around for just over a century, and it's not done growing. Drumming is bigger than us, and it needs us to be brave and disrupt. To keep reinventing, we must leave our comfort zones again and again. It's to stand on the very edge of the cliff, never quite falling, *but almost.* Pushing the limits of the known drives our evolution. This isn't for everyone, and most won't lead the charge. But we need sheepdogs amongst the sheep. Staying in the illusion of safety is to die. Riding the wave of change is when we feel most alive.

The drumset is always in a state of disquiet, and you're either riding that wave or you're left behind to become a fossil. When we have the courage to push our own evolution forward, the artform grows too. There are three areas the drumset is going that can unlock your deepest levels of bold self-expression. It's the new landscape and the shape of drumming to come.

• **Feet First:** Forget the old school 'hands down' rudimental approach. Drumming needs to be felt from the feet up, not the hands down. Hunting for ultimate self- expression we need to be grounded, using gravity as a tool. I started with hands first, and I couldn't shake the feeling of being unbalanced for years. I didn't find my solid balance behind the kit until much later. Drumming is dance, martial arts, and yoga combined, where a connection with the earth is everything. Next level balance roots us down so we can flow around the space that our instrument lives within. Shuffle the feet and tap dance the pedals to feel your center on your throne. This doesn't mean going to double bass, *although it could.* Ironically for me, it was only after I ditched my double bass pedals that I really started connecting with my drums in this way, feeling the rhythms in the soles of my feet. All movement and energy flows from our core center. Drumming from the feet first bonds us to drumming in a way that transforms our inner rhythm for all to hear.

• **Drumming is so much more than the notes:** It's about the virtues we live and our character which writes our story, coming out in every stroke we play. Evolution onlycomes with courage, determination, and faith. Look to the pioneers of the past, the ones who dared greatly to think different. We don't need to accomplish what they did, but we can walk alongside them. They broke barriers so we would have the freedom.

•**Singing Rhythms:** Counting and reading notes from a page is way overused. This keeps drummers stuck in their heads, overthinking and mired in self-doubt. Singing rhythms taps into the root of true confidence. Using the fifth limb of the voice feeds our creativity because we're now feeling rhythm from a deeper place.

Put the books away, close your eyes, and become the groove. Can you hear it clearly in your heart and mind first? '*If you can say it, you can play it!*' Singing rhythms out loud is a gateway to flow. Our ideas become a new language, phrased in a way that only we can express. It builds our focus so we can recall idea when it counts, never slowed by overthinking. Percussionists in India have been doing this for centuries, using beat syllables called Konnakol. In the US, beatboxing is the art of drumming with your mouth. Add some poetry, and now we're talking about hip-hop. Ella Fitzgerald did it years before that through jazz scatting. Listen to the cadence of languages around the world, each with its own musicality. We sing and speak rhythms every day! It's all around us. This approach is innate, a gift from nature, and doesn't need to be forced like rote learning and reading from books.

•**Open Handed:** If you're still crossing your hands 100% of the time, you're stuck in the past. Crossing your hands is a relic, an old story that's stunting your growth. Open handed drumming taps into the body language of inner power. With our arms at our sides with our chest out, our physiology moves to deep breathing and a calm strength. Our heart is now open to the world to dare greatly. To be vulnerable is the beginning of having the courage to reveal who we really are. This is the 'martial arts of drumming', where our left and right-side zones become our ally. When I started, I didn't go full open handed until after 17 years of crossing. I adapted one percent at a time to eventually go for it, but it didn't happen in a day. Take small steps forward, and then go as 'all in' as you can. And you can! We are ten times stronger than we think we are. We underestimate what we can accomplish with the compounding of time, but tomorrow is already here. What's at stake is your reinvention, and your future self won't regret it.

• **Today, be all we can be:** Should we waste our one shot to live legendary? That's not what the legends did. Let's stand on the shoulders of giants to step into the unknown, together.

Working these three dimensions into your daily practice, no matter how small, puts you on the right side of history. Most will stay where it's safe, never leaving the safe harbor of the known. But that's not you. You weren't put here to be average! Disruption and reinvention always comes from the audacious few, not the masses who follow. We're either living on the razor's edge of innovation, or we're falling behind. Destroy your ceilings. Shatter your limits. We have one shot to live our legacy. Rage against the dying of the light. THIS is the spirit of life through rhythm. Go deeper with the free video lesson **HERE**. Are you ready to unleash your potential in drumming and life? Chris Lesso's LTR DRUMMING METHOD is for drummers who want to reach higher. Get your free intro course at **chrislesso.net/LTRDRUMMING**

Check out Chris's *Modern Drummer* profile page at moderndrummer.com

Understanding the Language of Music

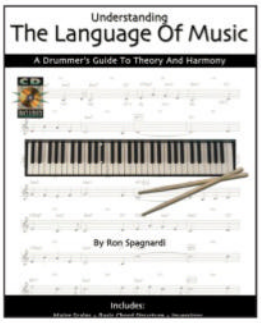
Roman Numerals and the Circle of 5ths

By Ron Spagnardi

Modern Drummer founder Ron Spagnardi wrote an excellent book called *Understanding the Language of Music, a Drummer's Guide to Theory and Harmony.* This book spells out the basics of theory and harmony in a very easy to understand way. It is a fantastic book for drummers looking to learn about the language of music beyond drumming. We are honored to reprint the parts of Ron's book here in *Modern Drummer* for everyone to read and learn.

This month we will be talking about a subject that drummers might not think is very inportant, Roman Numerals and the Circle of 5ths.. Last month we introduced and discussed form and structure. It is essential for drummers to know what the form and structure is for any song or music they are playing. However, the form and structure are only templates that contain important information. The information that is contained within those templates are melody and harmony. Knowing how roman numerals represent the harmony in a song, and how the circle of 5ths assist in creating a hamonic structure to a song will help the music speak to us as drummers.

Letting the music, "Tell us what to play" is a phrase that you will often hear stated by drummers when referring to creating drum parts for songs. You will even see this phrase a few times in this month's *Modern Drummer.* Knowing the language of how hamony is referred to (with Roman Numerals) will help you hear what the music is telling you to play, and knowing the circle of 5ths will help you know how (and why) that harmony is created for a song.

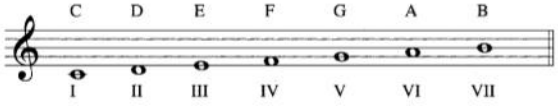


People often refer to learning "music theory," as being important. But many younger musicians and drummers often wonder why learning theory is so important. The definition of the word theory is, "A set of principles on which the practice of an activity is based." No matter what style of music you are playing, music has a set of principals or rules, that performing or creating music is based upon. Knowing these principals, rules, or theories, will help you hear what the music is "telling you to play" and create better drumming accompnaniment, parts, beats, or solos.

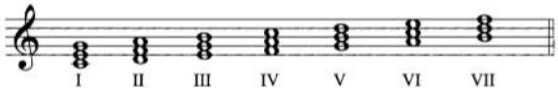
The Roman numeral system in music offers an easy method of identifying chords and chord progressions in every key. Here's how it works: The Roman numerals I through VII simply refer to the degrees of a scale. Since there are seven notes in a scale, the first seven Roman numerals are used.

I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Look at the C scale below and notice how Roman numerals I through VII relate to each degree of the scale.

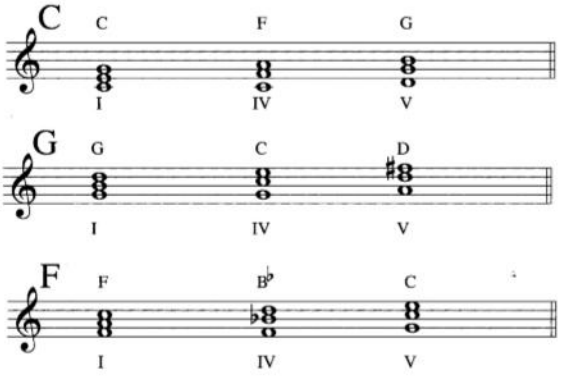


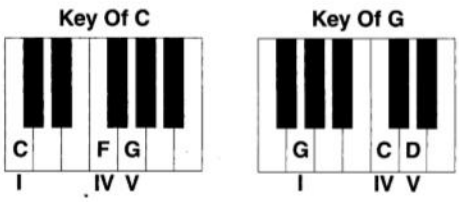
When we build a three-note chord on each degree of the C scale, we end up with the seven diatonic chords in the key of C major. (We'll delve more deeply into the resulting quality of these diatonic chords [major, dominant, minor, and diminished] later.)

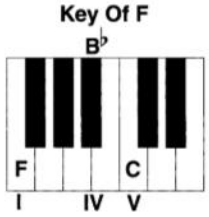


The beauty of the Roman numeral system lies in the fact that it is not limited to any particular key. In other words, the I chord is I in every key, IV is IV in every key, V is V in every key, etc.…

Notice in the example below that C, F, and G are the I, IV, and V chords in the key of C. In the key of G major, the I, IV, and V chords are G, C, and D. In the key of F, the I, IV, and V chords become F, B♭, and C.







Key	I	IV	V
C	C (C, E, G)	F (F, A, C)	G (G, B, D)
G	G (G, B, D)	C (C, E, G)	D (D, F#, A)
D	D (D, F#, A)	G (G, B, D)	A (A, C#, E)
A	A (A, C#, E)	D (D, F#,A)	E (E, G#, B)
E	E (E, G#, B)	A (A, C#, E)	B (B, D#, F#)
B	B (B, D#, F#)	E (E, G#, B)	F# (F#, A#, C#)
G♭	G♭ (G♭, B♭, D♭)	B (B, D#, F#)	D♭ (D♭, F, A♭)
D♭	D♭ (D♭, F, A♭)	G♭ (G♭, B♭, D♭)	A♭ (A♭, C, E♭)
A♭	A♭ (A♭, C, E♭)	D♭ (D♭, F, A♭)	E♭ (E♭, G, B♭)
E♭	E♭ (E♭, G, B♭)	A♭ (A♭, C, E♭)	B♭ (B♭, D, F)
B♭	B♭ (B♭, D, F)	E♭ (E♭, G, B♭)	F (F, A, C)
F	F (F, A, C)	B♭ (B♭, D, F)	C (C, E, G)

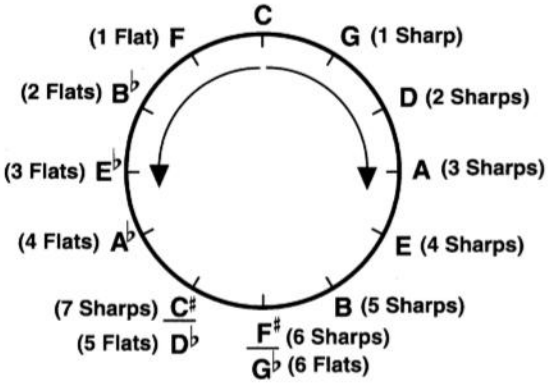
Not only does the Roman numeral system help us memorize chord changes to different tunes, it's also invaluable in transposition (playing the same tunes in different keys). Once you're adept at converting scale degrees to Roman numerals, transpositions to other keys are quick and easy to make.

The Circle Of 5ths

The Circle Of 5ths diagram on the following page demonstrates chords that move in intervals of a 5th. Look at the example. The arrows indicate that the circle can move clockwise or counterclockwise. Moving clockwise, the circle moves in intervals of a 5th towards the sharp keys. Each time you move up a 5th, another sharp is added.

As you move counterclockwise, the circle moves in intervals of a 5th downwards towards the flat keys. Each time you move down a 5th, another flat is added.

These natural progressions are very common in rock, pop, and jazz harmony because they are extremely strong chord progressions.



Spend time absorbing all of the material here. Be able to identify the I, IV, and V chords in every key. Then practice the I, IV, V progression clockwise through the Circle Of 5ths.

C, G, D, A, E, B, F#, C#, A♭, E♭, B♭, and F.

Then try the I, IV, V progression counterclockwise through the Circle Of 5ths.

C, F, B♭, E♭, A♭, D♭, G♭, B, E, A, D, and G.

Check out Ron's *Modern Drummer* profile page and get your copy of *Understanding the Language of Music* at moderndrummer.com

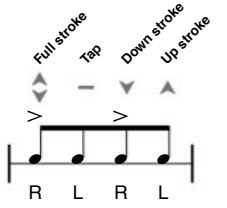
Accent Studies with Eighth Notes

By Joe Morello

This section combines alternate stickings with one handed stickings, while stressing accents. It is essential to maintain only two dynamic levels in each exercise: the accented level and the unaccented level. Also be sure to keep an even sound when moving from alternate strokes to one handed strokes and vice versa. The following is a list of suggestions for different ways to play this section:

- Play without accents– make sure each stick sounds the same, as though the exercise is being played with one hand.
- Vary the dynamic level between the accented notes and the unaccented notes. For example: 1. unaccented notes *p*, accents *mf*. 2. unaccented notes *mf*, accents f. 3. Unaccented notes *mp*, accents *ff*, etc.
- When one handed stickings are used, fill in sixteenths with the opposite hand.

Arrow Notation Key



Up and down arrows	=	Full Stroke
Dash	=	Tap Stroke
Down arrow	=	Down Stroke
Up arrow	=	Up Stroke

This key is the same as used in the book *Accents and Rebounds* to show continuity in Joe's continuation of his teacher G.L. Stone.

For example:

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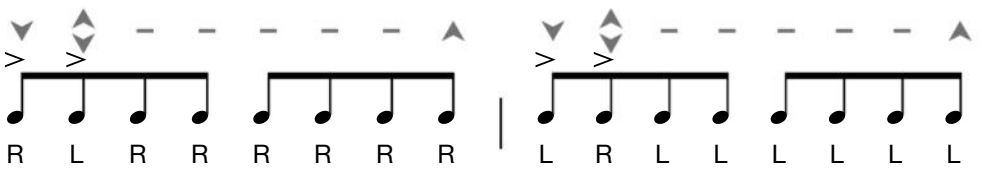
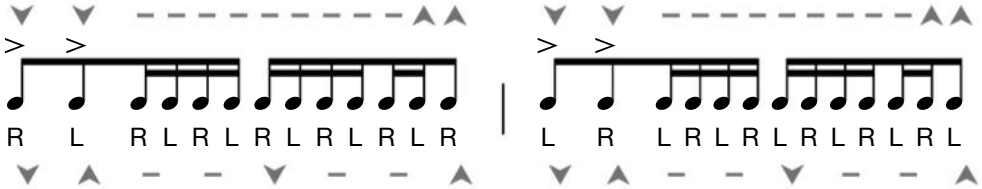


can be played:



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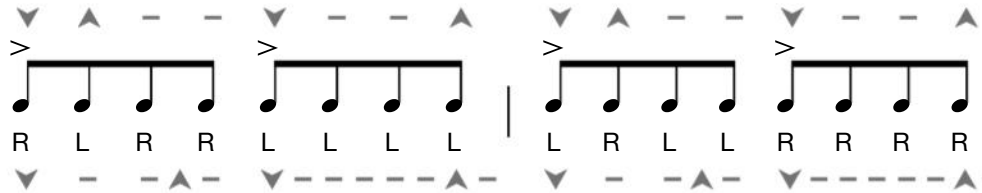
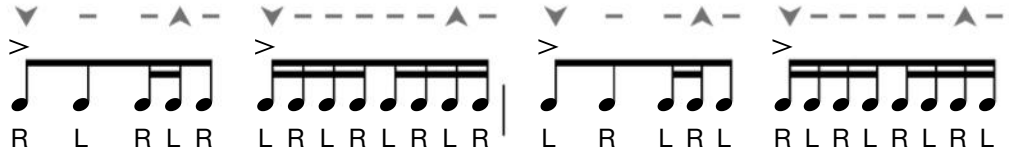
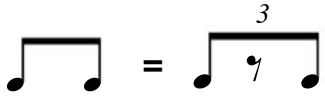


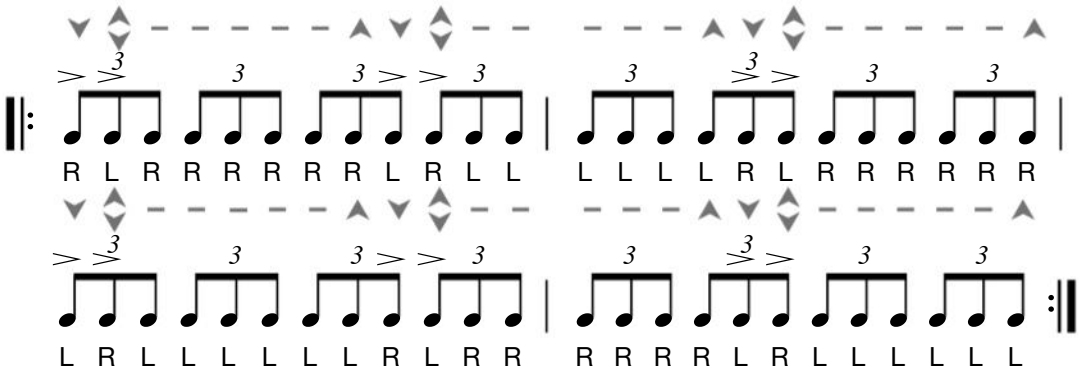
can be played:



Interpret 8ths jazz style:



Play as triplets. For example:



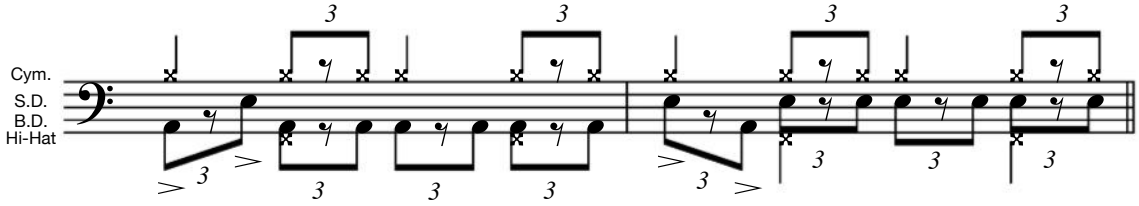
These exercises can also be applied to the drumset:

Play all previous suggestions while playing various patterns on bass drum and hi-hat. For example:

Play accented notes on tom-toms; unaccented notes on snare. Various patterns on bass and hi-hat.

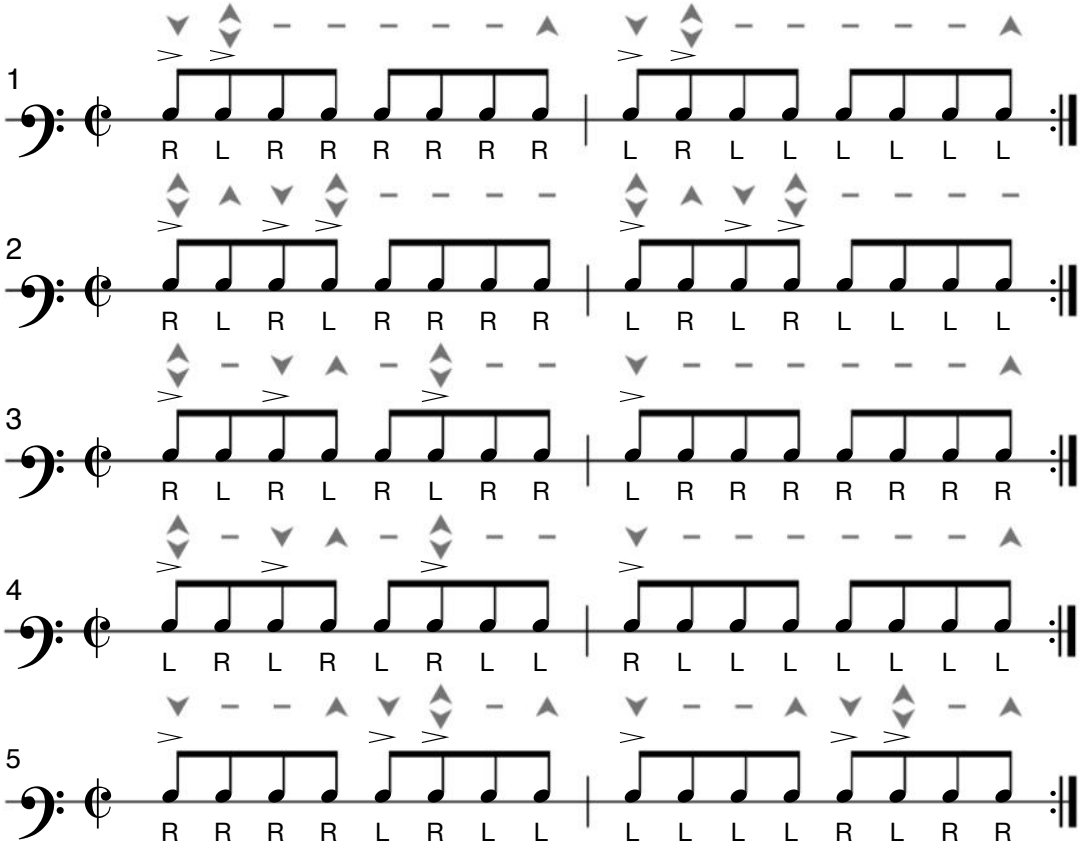
Rights with right foot on bass drum; lefts with left hand on snare; right hand plays 8th notes on ride cymbal; hi-hat on “2” and “4”.

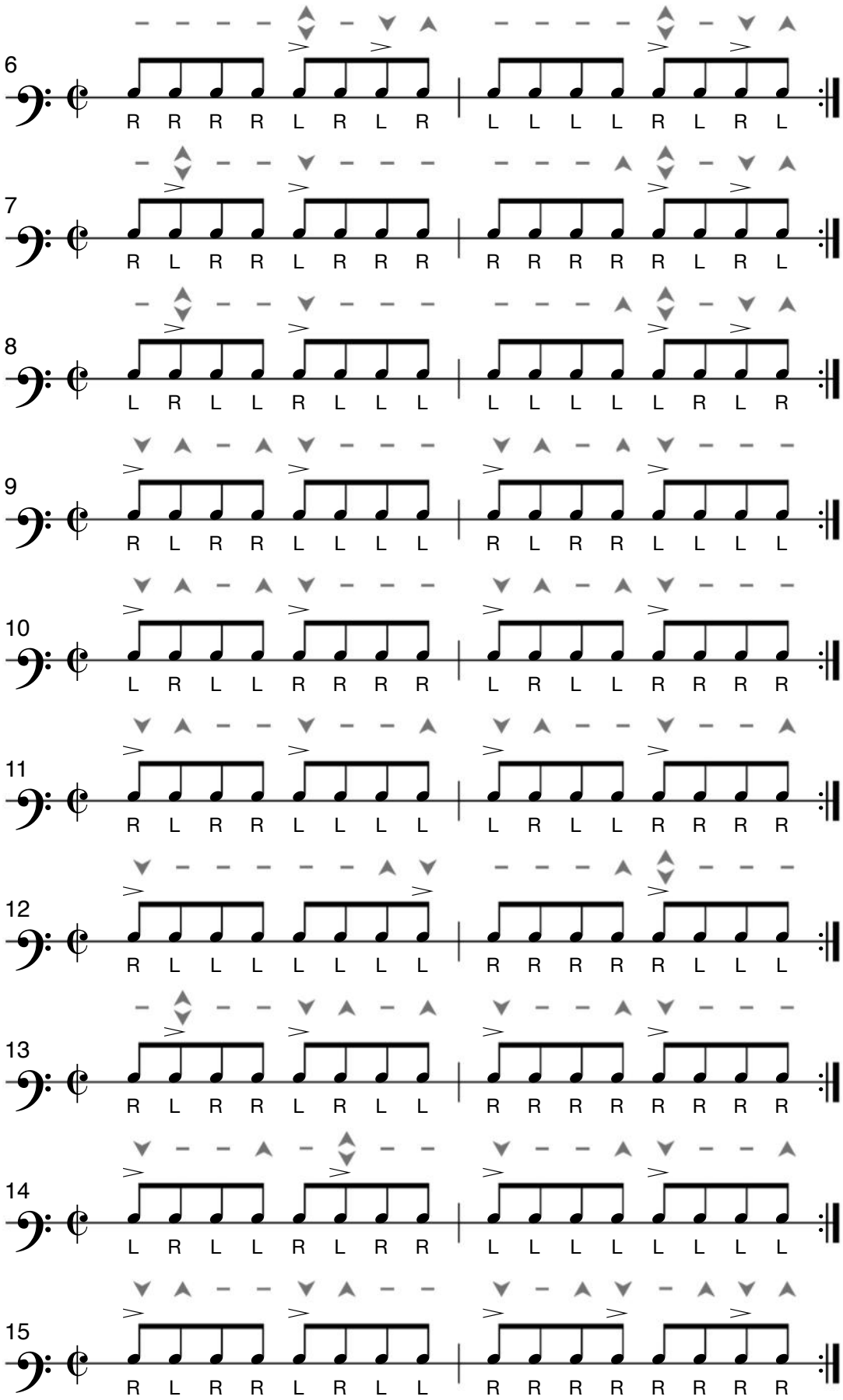
Interpret 8ths jazz style; rights on bass; lefts on snare; jazz rhythm on ride cymbal; hi-hat on “2” and 4”.



Play on double bass drums.

These are only a few of the many ways these exercises can be played. Try to find ways to apply these exercises to your own situation and your own needs. Remember: these exercises only have value if they are applied in a musical way.

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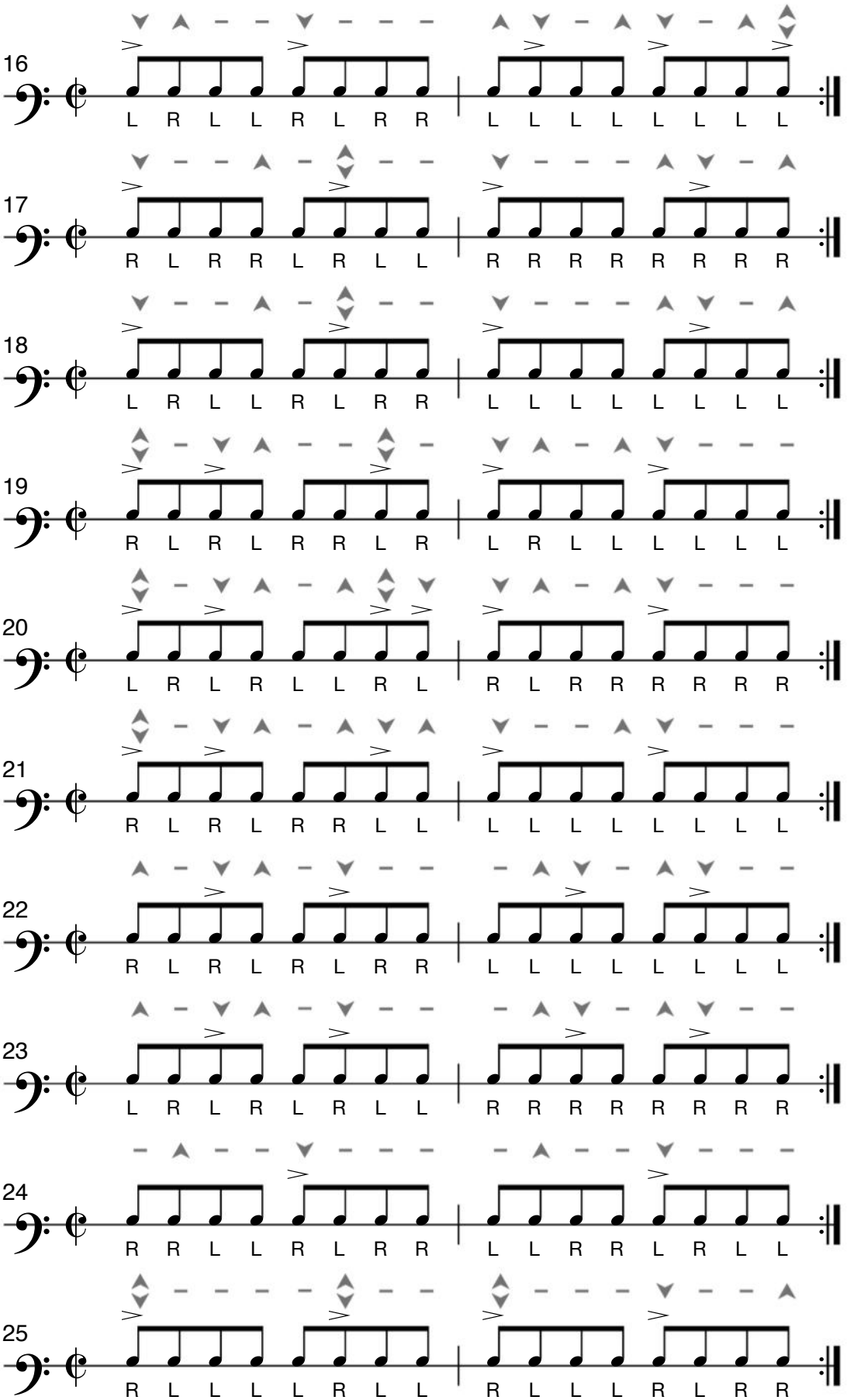
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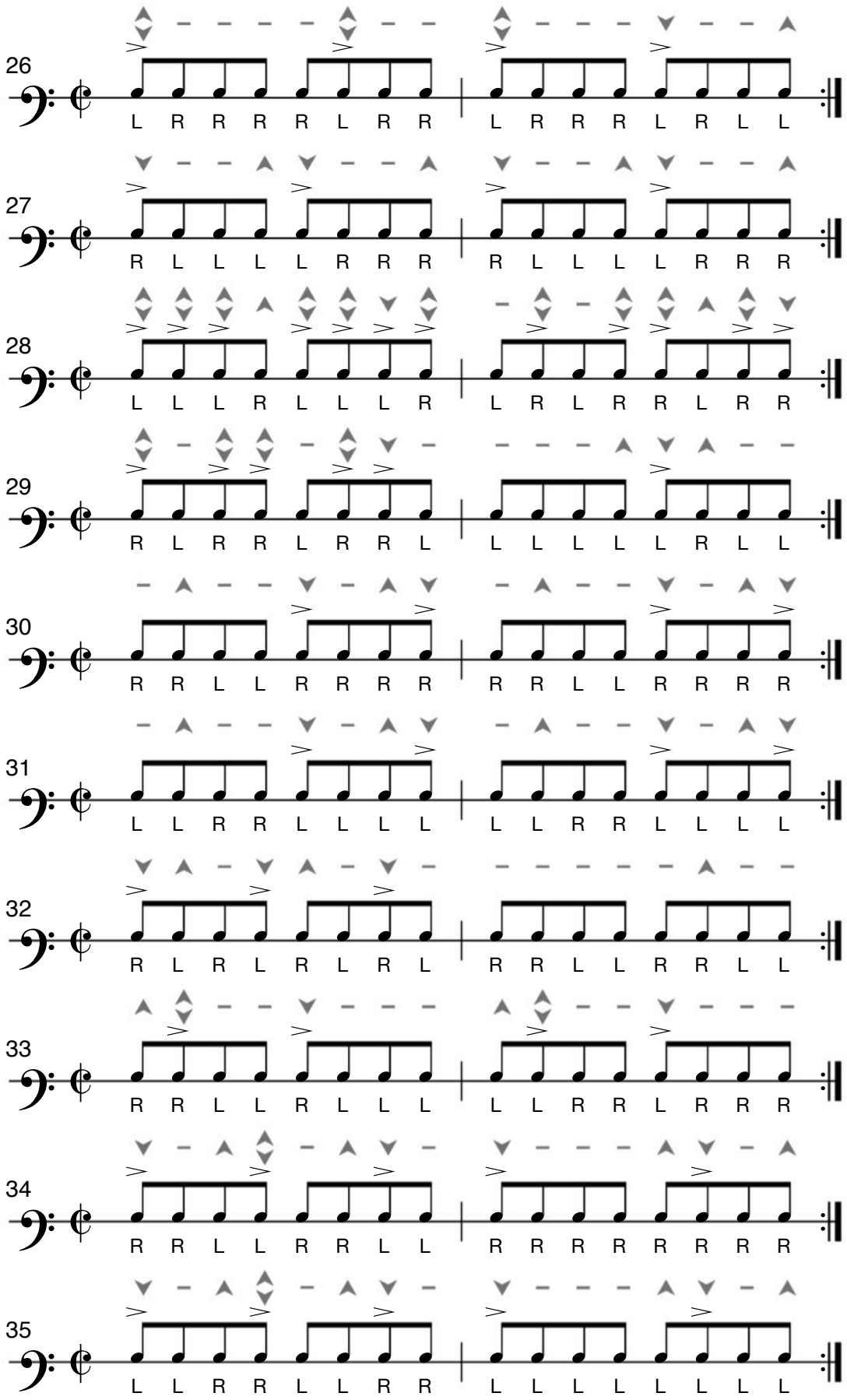
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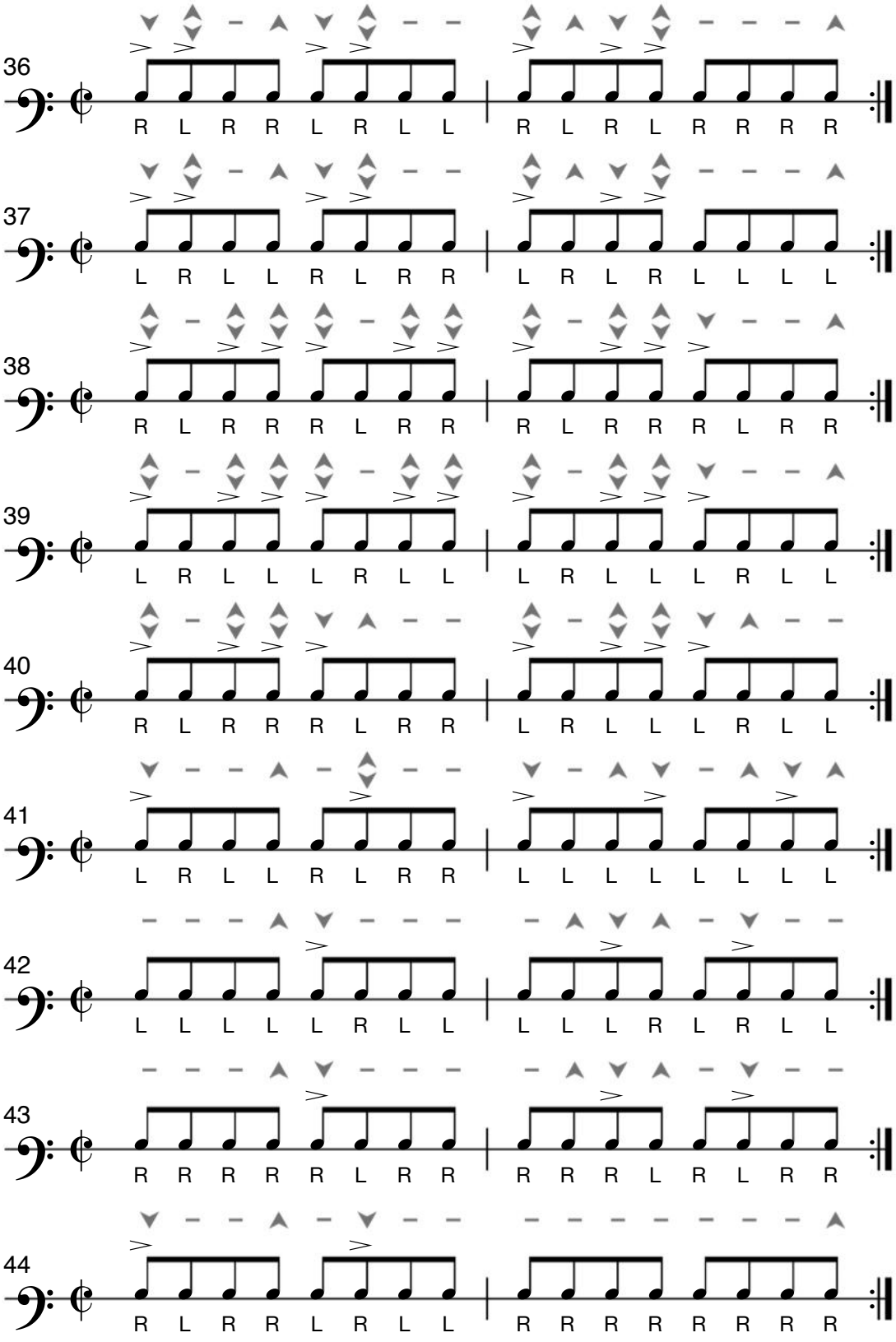

Check out Joe's *Modern Drummer* profile page and get your copy of *Master Studies* at moderndrummer.com

Lenny Kravitz
Talks Drums

By Mark Griffith

Lenny Kravitz has played drums, programmed the drum parts, or created the loops on all of his songs for the last 35 years with only two exceptions. He is a multi-instrumentalist songwriter walking in the tradition of Stevie Wonder and Prince who both played drums on many of their own records. It should come as no surprise that the upcoming Lenny Kravitz record called *Blue Electric Light* (due out on May 24th) features even more of Lenny's in the pocket drumming skills, as does his new single called "Human." As drummers, we are usually working with songwriters and performers who want "something" from us. However, determining exactly what that "something" is, can often be confusing. So why not go directly to the source, a legendary songwriter and performer who also knows a lot about playing the drums in great songs.

MD: What were the only two songs you didn't play on in your career?
LK: There is a track on *Mama Said* called "What Goes Around Comes Around" which was played by my touring drummer at the time, Zoro. I actually used my rhythm section with bassist LeBron Scott on that track. There's a track on *Five* called "Straight Cold Player" which is Cindy Blackman playing drums, otherwise everything you have ever heard on my music is me on the drums.
MD: What is the ratio of you playing live drums, creating loops, and programming drum parts on your records?
LK: Most of the time it's me "free playing." I don't play to clicks, I don't like it, I grew up listening to records and was taught by the guys I was listening to on those records. I learned how to create your own sense of two and four, I tend to be very laid back so playing to a click just feels nervous to me. It doesn't necessarily speak to where I wanna lay the groove, so most of time the drumming is me free playing.
MD: How do you construct and record a track?
LK: When I'm starting a track, I'll either start by playing drums to the song that's in my head, like Stevie used to do back in the day. Or I'll teach my guitarist Craig Ross the chords to the track and have him play it on acoustic or electric while I track the drums, just to keep me in the form of the song. I'll record my drum track, erase the "scratch" guitar and then I'll start from there with a drum track. There are tracks that have been programmed of have loops because I wanted the songs to feel that way. For instance, "Fly Away" is a good example of a song with a loop because I wanted it to feel that way. So I made my own drum loop. I do use a drum machine every now and again, actually this new album *Blue Electric Light* is probably the most drum machine I've ever used on a record. There's several songs with drum machines. But for most part of my recording career, it's usually just me playing drums.
MD: What drum machines do you use when you use them?
LK: Old LinnDrum's, the DMX, and sometimes a Roland 808.
MD: How do you decide what you want to play on and what you want to program?
LK: The song tells me.
MD: If you are *really* listening, the song will tell you *everything*, right?
LK: Exactly! I do what the song tells me to do.
MD: There's a long tradition of great songwriters who played drums on their records. Did any of them influence you a lot to you as a drummer?
LK: Paul McCartney, obviously Prince, Todd Rundgren, Maurice White, and Stevie of course! When those guys play drums they just think differently. Stevie Wonder is one of my favorite drummers that nobody ever talks about. I love a drummer who is not "just" a drummer. There are great drummers that know how to play on records, and there are great drummers that don't know how to play on records because all they're thinking about is the drums. I remember being a kid and all the drummers that got the attention were the big loud drummers, because kids want that. Kids would say that Ringo sucked. But I'll say that in the Beatles song "A Day in the Life" when Ringo goes around the toms after the lyric "I heard the news today oh boy…" I've never heard anybody that could do that like him, nobody! Ringo is lyrical, he plays for the song, he plays with the group, I love drummers that are really considering every part of the song. They don't overplay, they fit in the pocket, and they know

Paul McCartney, obviously Prince, Maurice White, and Stevie of course! When those guys play drums they just think differently.

Mark Seliger

how to paint the picture. Then there's drummers who are bombastic, loud, and also fabulous like John Bonham, Ginger Baker, Mitch Mitchell… But the drummers that always got me when I was a kid were the ones that were lyrical.

I didn't know that that was Stevie playing on "Inner Visions" but I loved that drumming. That was the first album that I really started to dissect all the parts. And even the songs where the tempo moved a little were amazing. Everyone thinks that tempo isn't supposed to move. So many drummers just care about what they call "perfect time." But a lot of my favorite and all-time classic songs, some of the most genius music, the tempos pick up a little, and they pull back down. If you listen to the Beatles song "The End" and you start it over again, you'll hear that it was much slower when it started. But it didn't matter! It moved because songs are a living organism. The other day I was listening to a Roy Ayers song called "Liquid Love," it's just ridiculous. I put it on repeat, and when we went back to the beginning, it was way slower than it was at the end. But who cares!

MD: The drummer on that track could be the great Dennis Davis who also played with Stevie for years as well.

LK: There's that connection, I didn't know that.

MD: Speaking of Ringo, when you watch the movie *Get Back*, you'll see that Ringo is the perfect songwriter's drummer. While Paul, George, and John are writing, Ringo is sitting there quietly, and when they have a tune, he has already heard the song as they created it, and he let the song tell him what to do, then he plays the perfect part, which is what the song has told him to play.

LK: What seems simple is not simple. As you know, when you find the groove for a song, there is an art to fitting in and carrying that groove.

MD: The drums on "Paralyzed" from the new record are heavy, what can you tell me about the drums on that track?

LK: That was a live first or second take. That was Craig on guitar and me playing drums as I described earlier.

MD: The drums sound great, what kind of drums do you have in your studio?

LK: They are mismatched Ludwig's. I can't remember what sizes were on that track, because in the studio it's whatever sounds right for the track. Whatever snare, whatever size kick, and whatever high tom. But it's pretty much an older Ludwig Maple kit.

MD: You are using some cool tuned cowbell type of sounds on the new single "Human," and on "Bundle of Joy." Are those real cowbells or programmed?

LK: Those are all real cowbells, it's a DMX drum machine, but all the cowbells are real. I played like four tracks of cowbells. I like to take the drum machine part and add sounds. It humanizes the drum track. I love playing cowbells it's a great sound.

MD: Tell me about the track "Bundle of Joy."

LK: That was a bitch to cut on the drums, just keeping that tom groove. There was a bunch of double kicks on that, and I hit really hard on that one. That tune was about that sort of slightly distant, yet bombastic drum sound, it was fun to cut. I was going for that Power Station-New York City 80s drum thing on that track.

MD: The snare drum sound on that track is ridiculous, what drum is that?

LK: Thank you. That's a Ludwig vintage Black Beauty on that one. Most of the things in the studio are vintage.

MD: What are some of your favorite drum tracks from throughout your career?
LK: The track "My Precious Love" on the first album is a 3/4 thing and the time is really good, the groove just breathes, that's one of my favorite drum tracks. There's a track on *Circus* called "Thin Ice" that's a big sort of Bonham-y thing. Of course "Are You Gonna Go My Way" was fun.
MD: You are killin' that Motown 4 groove!
LK: Yeah, that's a classic groove. "Always on the Run" was fun to cut with Slash playing guitar. I was playing drums while he was playing guitar, once we got those two parts, I played my guitar part and then I played the bass. My entire drumming influence on my first record, *Let Love Rule* was Ringo and Stevie.
MD: How did you first learn how to play drums? How did the drums come to you?
LK: Drums was the fourth instrument that I learned, but it was the first instrument I *wanted* to learn! But I lived in an apartment in New York City, so that wasn't gonna happen. I started on the piano because we had a little Spinet piano in our apartment, then I learned guitar, then I bought a bass.

I joined the orchestra in junior high, and I'm so glad I did. My music teacher in Santa Monica was a woman from Texas by the name of Lida Beasley, she taught me a lot, and she could play every instrument in the orchestra. She'd be conducting the orchestra and if somebody wasn't playing the clarinet part right, she picked up the clarinet and played the part. She did the same with the French horn, the tuba, the violin… This woman was a genius and probably part of my inspiration to become a multi-instrumentalist. I wanted to play drum set but there wasn't a drum set in the orchestra, and she's said you're not going to play drum set until you learn how to play percussion, so I joined the percussion section. I played snare drum, glockenspiel, marimba, timpani, chimes, tambourine… I learned how to play all the classical percussion. Then I got to the drum set. When I got on the set, I was already familiar with all the percussion stuff, plus I was always listening to records. That's how it happened.
MD: Do you ever actually sit down and practice drums now?
LK: Not often to "just" practice. But I'm always cutting tracks, which is *like* practicing. So (in a way) I'm always practicing playing while I'm cutting tracks. It's always been a dream of mine to take a month with a great drum teacher of my choice and bring them to the Bahamas and just do lessons for a month, we could just work on things. Of course, I would have to stop cutting tracks. But it's always been a dream of mine to do that on all the instruments I play, it's just very hard to find the time.
MD: I'll give you my number. What would you like to improve on?
LK: I just want to learn things, different techniques, and concentrate more on different styles. I never really worked on stuff, but I have my own technique and I have my own way of playing. If you listen to my records throughout the years, I'm playing a lot of different things, but there's always things to learn and work on.
MD: Who are some of your favorite drummers today?
LK: I'm listening to all the older cats: James Gadson, all the drummers that played with James Brown, Carlton Barrett, the drummer from Bob Marley & The Wailers, Fred White and Ralph Johnson from Earth, Wind & Fire, and some of the studio cats like Steve Gadd. Of course, I love Bonham, Mitch Mitchell, Billy Cobham, and Ginger Baker. Right now I love that band Khruangbin, they just groove so hard, their drummer is named DJ Johnson. I actually got to cut a track with the legendary Tony Allen.
MD: Is that on the new record?

> I didn't know that that was Stevie playing on "Inner Visions" but I loved that drumming. That was the first album that I really started to dissect all the parts.

LK: No, it isn't on the new record, but it will come out soon!
MD: Then there is your current drummer, Franklin Vanderbilt?
LK: Franklin is a fantastic drummer, but he's working on his solo project, so we have a new drummer for the next tour named Jaz Kayser out of the UK. She's just a great drummer. She's got great style, she's a great listener, and she plays many different styles. All the drummers who have played with me from Zoro, to Cindy, to Franklin, and now Jaz— You have to be able to play many different styles, because on my gig you have to sound like 15 different drummers. As you can tell, I'm passionate about the drums.
MD: I can hear that passion in your voice, and see it in your eyes.

Check out Lenny's profile page, at moderndrummer.com

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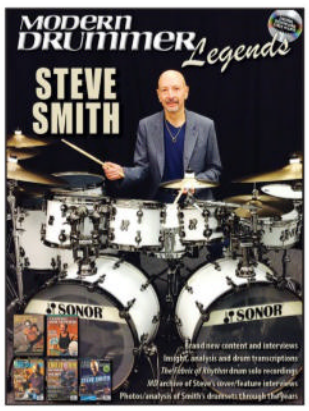

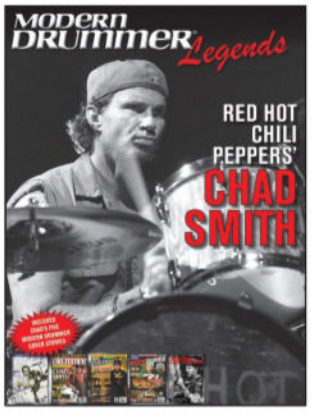

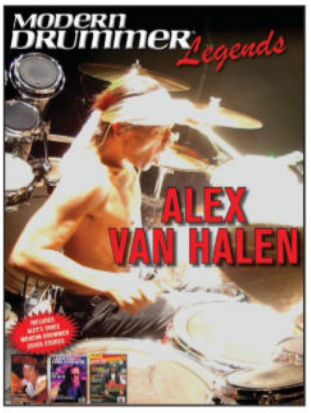

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OUT NOW!

Modern Drummer is spotlighting new recordings that have the drums at the center of their sound. These recordings might be drummer-led, or just include a high-quality, special, or unique drumming and musical performance from the drummer and/or musicians in the band. This column is not restricted to only recordings, we will also be spotlighting new books and DVD's that are being released. We encourage our readers to listen to the recordings that inspire them and keep looking for new musical avenues to explore. You'll never know what new music you might find inspiring! Listen and learn.

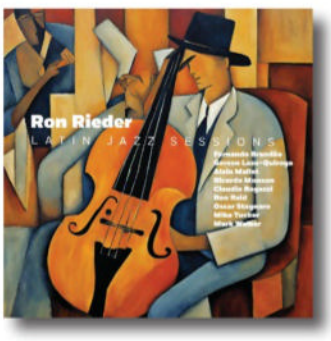
Mimiko Watanabe

Being Guided by the Light
Billy Hart drums
Jojo Records

I love to hear Billy Hart play drums in groups with many different soloists, because Billy plays behind every individual musician differently, always giving them exactly what they need. No two people (or musicians) are the same, right? So why should we (as drummers) play behind everyone the same way? Then there is pianist Mamiko Watanabe's record *Being Guided by the Light*. The trio is the most magical of musical contexts; whether it's Hendrix, Jarrett, or The Police. Trios allow the musicians to bend the harmony, melody, and the time. They put all three musicians on equal footing. So what does Billy Hart, this modern genius of the drums do when he has only one (sometimes two) soloists to accompany, he finds different sounds, and different approaches for every tune. (No two tunes are the same either.) And he plays the drums like a composer and like a piano. Billy Hart's percussive transparency is magical, he lets music happen, and this trio recording is no different. Hart and bassist Santi DeBriano allow Watanabe to go anywhere she wants to.

Ron Rieder

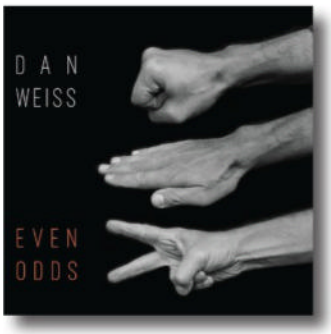
Latin Jazz Sessions
Mark Walker drums
Ricardo Monzon percussion
Ronaldo Music



Composer Ron Rieder's new record splits it's musical approach between Samba and Afro-Cuban jazz, and veteran drummer Mark Walker is just the right drummer to make it all happen. Rieder's Afro -Cuban tunes drive while the Samba's float. Walker's hook-up with bassist Oscar Stagnaro on the Samba's, and with bassist Gerson Lazo-Quiroga and the Afro-Cuban tunes is impeccable, and Alain Mallet's piano just adds to the versatile rhythm section. Walker's early Samba break on "The Samba Moon" is worth the price of admission alone. The percussive team of Mark Walker and percussionist Ricardo Monzon work together nicely each leaving space for the other and kicking it into overdrive when appropriate. Listen to their gigantic groove on "Mambo Jumbo" and "Capitol Mayhem." When the compositions are this good, it's hard to make them sound bad, and this band makes Rieder's compositions shine, the songs are the real star of this fine record.

Dan Weiss

Even Odds
Dan Weiss drums
Cygnus Recordings



On the notes to his new record *Even Odds*, drummer Dan Weiss explains that, "Over the last several years, I found myself using the drum set more as a compositional tool. The ideas from the drums have become the groundwork for my music. Every tune on Even Odds (with the exception of 'The Children of Uvalde' and 'Fathers and Daughters') has a highly composed drum part." Hey drummers, has he gotten you attention yet? Dan Weiss is a unique drummer that melds Indian rhythms, American jazz, and the drumset into an instantly identifiable tapestry of "Dan Weiss Music." The instrumentation of piano (Matt Mitchell,) saxophone (Miguel Zenon) and drums, further adds to the uniqueness of Weiss' music. I particularly like the tunes that are named after musicians like "Bu," "Max Roach," and "Nusrat." As an interesting aside, I love that Dan Weiss also appears wearing t-shirts from bands like Mushuggah at gigs and in pictures (as he does on the inside of this CD.) There are musicians that lack creativity, and there are musicians that have enough open-minded creativity inside them for a dozen other musicians, that is Dan Weiss. *Even Odds* is his most enjoyable record yet.

Jim White

All Hits: Memories
Jim White drums
Self-Produced

Jim White's recording of solo drumming and electronic accompaniment is interesting. The drums are recorded well, and the compositions are unique. The songs are edited quickly into one another creating a sort of suite. White's use of mallets and brushes create a nice sound palette, so when Jim goes to sticks the contrast in sound really stands out. While this is not a recording for everyone, for fans of the avant-garde or 20th Century Classical music will find Jim's music and this recording to be refreshing addition to the tradition.

Yes! Trio

Spring Sings
Ali Jackson drums
jazz&people records

The Yes! Trio is not a new endeavor, pianist Aaron Goldberg, bassist Omer Avital, and drummer Ali Jackson have been together for 30 years, and this is their third recording. They are a collective that is filled with musical surprises. They can shift directions on a dime, dig deep into a groove, amaze you with flash and fire, or pull you closer with subtle delicacy. On their newest record *Spring Sings*, drummer Ali Jackson has penned six of the trio's tunes and the trio brings them to life. This trio has absorbed all of the different piano trio approaches from the past and assembled them into one unique direction. Listen to the time hover in midair on "2K Blues" and then kick in for another chorus. Listen to Ali burn hot on a low flame before his melodic exchanges. Listen to Jackson's beautiful composition "Sancion," his funky "Omeration" and "Fivin,'" and the simply classic shuffle on "Shufflonzo." This is a fun trio, and a fun record!

Charles McPherson

Reverence
Billy Drummond drums
Smoke Sessions

There are quite a few drummers on the New York Jazz scene who get a little overlooked. They are not "old masters," and they are not "young lions." Billy Drummond is one such drummer. Equally at home in the avant-garde, a traditional bebop, or hard bop setting, Billy Drummond is a musician's drummer (and noted audiophile.) His playing and his sound with the legendary Charles McPherson on *Reverence* is (as always) note perfect. His snap on "Surge" pushes, his bounce on "Blues for Lonnie in Three" sways and swings, and his support on "Dynamic Duo" is perfect. Billy's playing behind Terrell Stafford on "Dynamic Duo" sends the tune into the stratosphere. Billy's Latin-ish funky feel on "Ode to Barry" is the perfect cherry on top. Smoke Sessions is making records that sound and feel like those classic old Blue Note records, and *Reverence* is a great example.

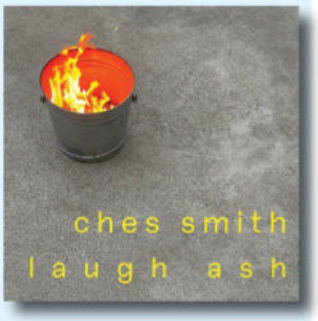
Brian Bromberg

Lafaro
Charles Ruggiero drums
Be Squared Productions

To embark on a tribute to a legendary trio such as the Bill Evans Trio with bassist Scott Lafaro and Paul Motian is a daunting task, because Evans' trio created their own influential and singular approach to the piano trio. I am happy to say the trio of bassist Brian Bromberg, pianist Tom Zink, and drummer Charles Ruggiero met the task at hand head on. While Bromberg's trio might have a bit more fire and a little less impressionism, this is a fine recording. The trio meets as three musical equals and paint some very fine music. Ruggiero walks a fine line between all of Evans' most capable drummers, Paul Motian, Larry Bunker, Philly Joe Jones, Joe LaBarbera, Marty Morell, and Eliot Zigmund; All while adding his own drumming voice to the mix. Charles Ruggiero has a great sound and a spectacular touch on the drums, and he prods the trio with perfection. Zink absorbs Evans' approach, and Bromberg's respectful tribute to Lafaro's bass playing carries the proceedings forward. This is one of the better piano trio recordings of recent times.

Ches Smith

Laugh Ash
Ches Smith drums
Pyroclastic Records



Drummer Ches Smith is one of those musicians who has been quietly becoming a giant in drumming. In a recent *Modern Drummer* interview Pete Magadini told me that Ches is, "One of the forefront drummers of our time." He has worked with John Zorn, Dave Holland, David Torn, and Mr. Bungle. Ches' new record *Laugh Ash* sometimes hits me as a Peter Gabriel record without Peter Gabriel (if that makes sense.) There are machines, loops, electronics, and drums all combined to create a beautiful pad for the ensemble of musicians to perch upon and leap into midair, not knowing exactly where they'll land, but always landing in an interesting place. This is very sincere music that is at one time haunting and then hysterical. Smith is painting beautiful soundscapes for his band to interact with. Creativity and groove reign supreme on *Laugh Ash* and in everything Ches Smith does.

Rodrigo Recabarren/Pablo Menares/ Yago Vasquez

Familia
Rodrigo Recabarren drums
Greenleaf Records

Unfortunately, "Latin" music all gets thrown into a big barrel, and that is unfortunate. Spain, Cuba, Brazil, Argentina, Columbia, Mexico (and others,) all have deep and different musical cultures and traditions with ancient roots, and unique sounds. With *Familia* we can add Chile' to the ever-growing

(and my incomplete) list of (so-called) "Latin" jazz music. By reading the notes to this record I believe the members of the trio are all from Chile', which casts this band's music in a much different light than you might expect. It leans more on subtle impressionism than overt Latin "fire." What a wonderful recording this piano trio has created! *Familia* is not a "Latin-Jazz" record, it is a "Jazz-Latin" or maybe more appropriately a Chilean-jazz record. The members of the trio composed all of this richly harmonic, melodic, and rhythmic music. Whatever you call it, *Familia* is a beautiful record filled with beautiful music which (unless you are a resident or visitor of Santiago) you might not have ever heard before.

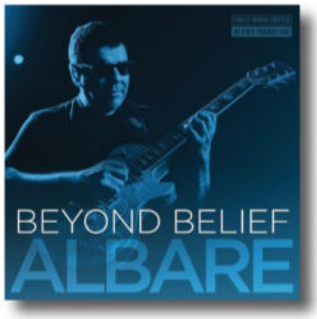
Joel Haynes Trio + special guest Seamus Blake

Transitions
Joel Haynes drums
CellarLive Records

There are great musicians and drummers everywhere. Hailing from different parts of Canada, drummer Joel Haynes, bassist Jodi Proznick, and pianist Tilden Webb are a very experienced rhythm section. On this, Haynes' second record as a leader, the trio gets to play behind saxophonist Seamus Blake as well. Recorded in front of a live audience, *Transitions* is an exciting and swinging record. You feel (and hear) the air in the room as Haynes pushes Blake throughout "House of Haynes" and grooves through Oasis' "Champagne Supernova." Joel's solo on the ending vamp of his self-penned tune "Impress Me" does exactly that. This is indeed an impressive recording.

Albare

Beyond Belief
Pablo Bencid drums
Alfi Records



Guitarist Albert Dadon (aka Albare) has brought us a mature band playing mature music. This is not to call this "old" music. All music doesn't have to break new ground or being on the cutting edge. Sometimes musicians just want to express their gratitude in life, that's what I feel *Beyond Belief* is doing. It is positive and very listenable music. Drummer Pablo Bencid frames Albare's music perfectly, he doesn't let anything "settle" nor does he push anything over the edge. Bencid's groove behind the piano solo on "No Regrets" is very funky, his tom sound on "Feeling Moody" and "I Believe" is spectacular, and his laid-back backbeat on "Ladino Jazz" is perfect. The tunes are good, the playing is nice. *Beyond Belief* is for any fans of classic Lee Ritenour or Larry Carlton.

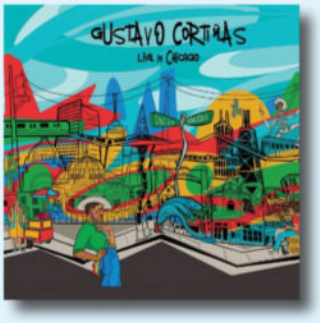
PSA Trio

PSA
Avery Logan drums
Self-Produced

The organ trio has been reborn. Guitarist Pritesh Walia, organist Sharik Hasan, and drummer Avery Logan have taken the rich history of this instrumentation and added a lot. This is not your father's "chitlin circuit" organ trio (*not that there is anything wrong with that!*) You won't hear organ trio standards from PSA. It's not even an extension of Tony Williams Lifetime 1960's organ trio. Instead, PSA are infusing drum and bass, a deep sense of modern funk, and electronica to the fold. But after hearing the unexplainable "Circle Around" and thinking that you know where this is going, the trio brings you back to the organ tradition of shuffling swing on "Cliff Dunes." Drummer Avery Logan really shines throughout this record, his backbeat placement on "Dogwood" is stellar, and the grooves on both "Don't Look Down" and "Troxy Fot" percolate with excitement. Sharik Hasan takes us to church on "Hymn," and the trio brings the slow burn subtle fire that explodes at the conclusion of "Onward." This is a band to watch!

Gustavo Cortinas

Live in Chicago
Gustavo Cortinas drums
Self-Produced



On this double CD, drummer, composer, and leader Gustavo Cortinas has assembled a stellar sextet of musicians (trumpet, tenor sax, trombone, and rhythm section) to present a night of his own music recorded in front of a live audience in Chicago. "Overture" starts with a simple clave' rhythm and takes off into all directions from there. The band is patient, and the compositions are well arranged. Cortinas' earthy drumming and percussion guides the band through the music as he punctuates the sections, plays melodic lines on the drums, and maneuvers through the solos. Cortinas' music is bluesy and deeply felt, and the band is well rehearsed. The sextet and the music is tight, while leaving ample space for interpretation. If I had to describe it, I would say that Cortinas' music is very Mingus like. Melodies segue into ensembles, and without notice morph into solos, which turn back into snaky ensembles before turning into melodies right before your ears. Sometimes it is raucous, sometimes solemn, but the music it is always drenched in emotion. Gustavo Cortinas is a talented musician that deserves wider recognition.

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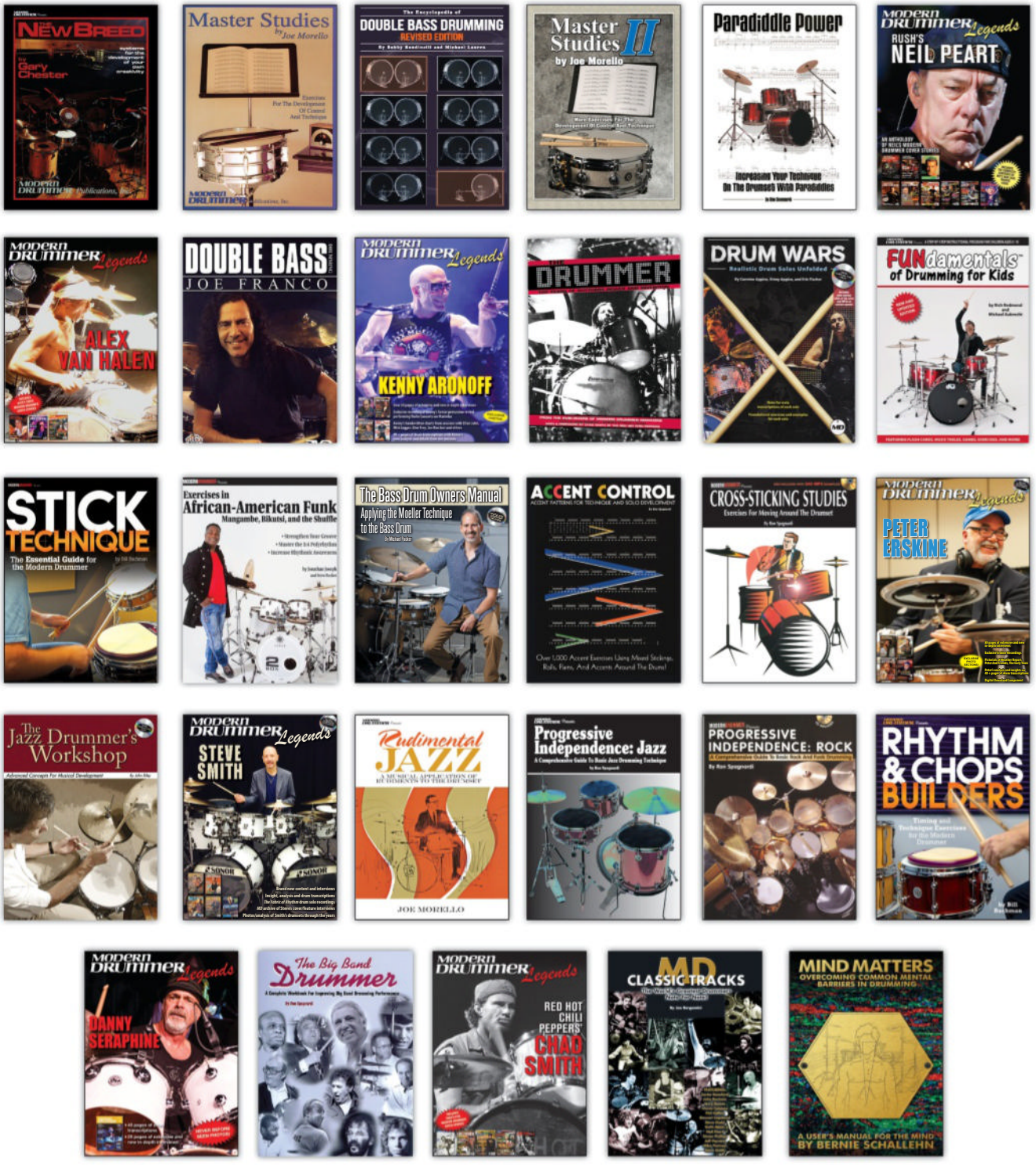

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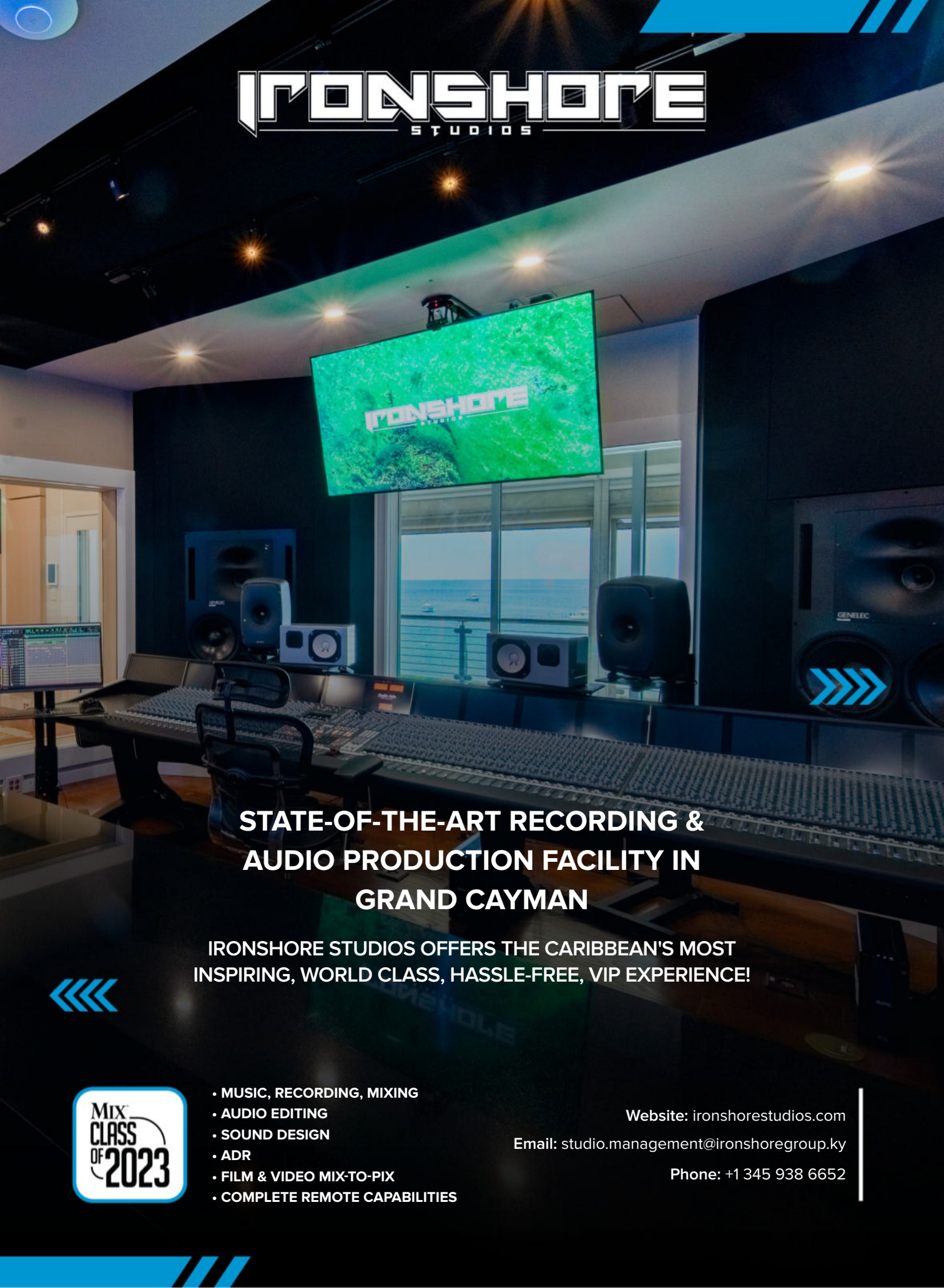
Bruno Esrubilsky - Mitski Tour Set

Photos by Jason Mehler

DRUMS: GRETSCH Late 50's /early 60's Round Badge, 3ply maple/gum in White Marine Pearl Finish: 8x12 Rack Tom, 14x14 and 16x16 Floor Toms, 14x20 Bass Drum, Main Snare: 6.5x14 Pearl Sensitone Alloy with Puresound Snare Wires, Side Snare: Vintage 5.5x14 Gretsch Round Badge in White Marine Pearl with Puresound Snare Wires.
HEADS: EVANS Drumheads. Bass Drum: EQ4 Batter, Rack and Floor Toms: G1 coated, Main Snare: Coated G1, Side Snare: Calftone.
CYMBALS: ZILDJIAN: From left to right: 20" A custom EFX crash, 20" K Cluster Crash, 15" K Custom Special Dry Hi-Hats, 21" K Custom Special Dry Ride (with Promark sizzler,) 18" K Custom Special Dry Crash, 18" K Sweet Crash, Clap Stack.
HARDWARE: Pearl Stands, DW 9000 Bass Drum Pedal.
COWBELL: Pearl Horacio Hernandez Model.

DRUMSTICKS: PROMARK 5B Rebound Drumsticks, Broomsticks, Brushes, Hot Rods.
ACCESSORIES: Big Fat Snare Drum "Quesadillas" muffles for all drums.
MICROPHONES: Kick Inside: Shure beta 91A, Kick Outside: DPA 4055, Snare 1 Top: Josephson e22, Snare 1 Bottom: Beyerdynamic m201, Snare 2 Top: Josephson e22, Snare 2 Bottom: Beyerdynamic m201, Hi-Hat: Miktek C5, Rack Tom: DPA 4099 Extreme SPL, Floor Tom 1: DPA 4099 Extreme SPL, Floor Tom 2: DPA 4099 Extreme SPL, Overhead Stage Right: AEA N8, Overhead Stage Left: AEA N8, Clapstack: Miktek PM10.

Check out Bruno's Tour Kit Rundown (coming soon) and others at youtube.com/@ModernDrummerOfficial.



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